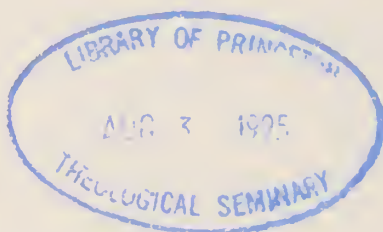


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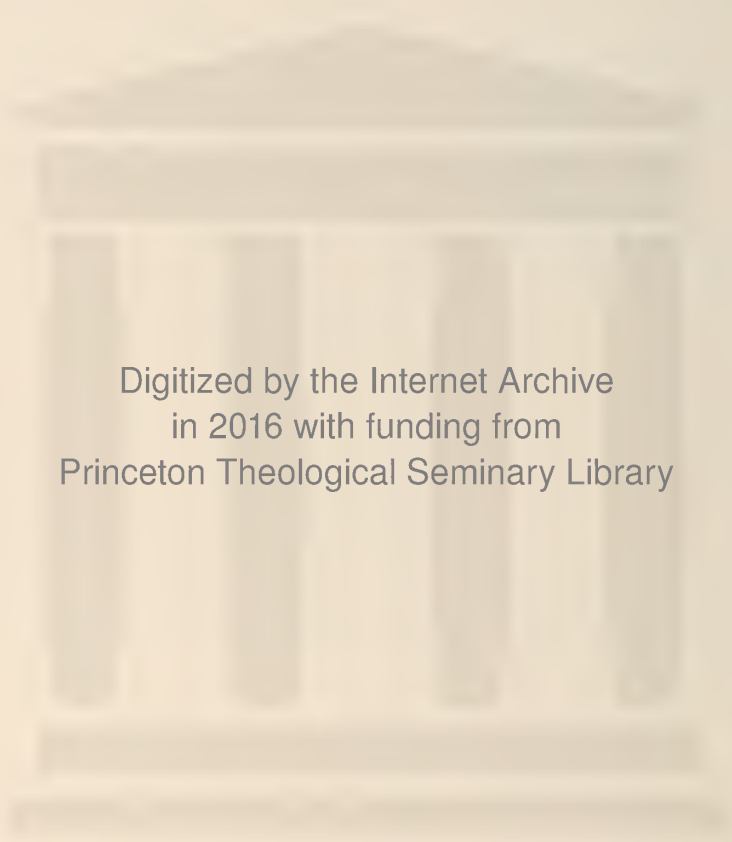


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THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME XIV, NUMBER 2 NEW SERIES 1993

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Theology and Science: The Quest for a New
Apologetics

J. WENTZEL VAN HUYSSTEEN

Narratives of a Vulnerable God

WILLIAM C. PLACHER

God's People: A Community without Walls

ALAN NEELY

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A Future with Hope

J.J.M. ROBERTS

The Love God Does

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Inheriting the Promise

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CONTENTS

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

- Theology and Science: The Quest for a New
Apologetics *J. Wentzel van Huyssteen* 113
- Narratives of a Vulnerable God *William C. Placher* 134
- God's People: A Community without Walls *Alan Neely* 152

SERMONS

- A Future with Hope *J. J. M. Roberts* 162
- The Love God Does *Charles L. Bartow* 165
- Inheriting the Promise *Miriam Therese Winter* 170
- Faculty Publications (1992) 173

BOOK REVIEWS

- A History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 1, Beginnings to 1500, by
Samuel Hugh Moffett *Gerald H. Anderson* 183
- The Making of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, by
Bruce M. Metzger, Robert C. Dentan, and Walter Harrelson *J. J. M. Roberts* 184
- The Women's Bible Commentary, ed. Carol A. Newsom and
Sharon H. Ringe *Linda Day* 186
- The Anchor Bible Dictionary, 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman *Bruce M. Metzger* 187
- No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical
Women, by Cheryl Anne Brown *Joan E. Cook* 189

Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text, by D. C. Parker	<i>Bruce M. Metzger</i>	191
Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament, ed. P. J. Hartin and J. H. Petzer	<i>William A. Beardslee</i>	192
Calvin's Concept of the Law, by I. John Hesselink	<i>David Little</i>	193
The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion, vol. 1, by Karl Barth, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley	<i>Leanne Van Dyk</i>	195
Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, ed. Nicholas Lossky, José Míguez Bonino, John S. Pobee, Thomas Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Pauline Webb	<i>Alan Neely</i>	196
Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost, by Paul K. Conkin	<i>James H. Moorhead</i>	197
The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912, by Ralph E. Luker; and Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925), by Ronald C. White, Jr.	<i>Eugene Y. Lowe, Jr.</i>	199
The Church in Latin America, 1492-1992, ed. Enrique Dussel	<i>Richard Shaull</i>	201
A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story, by William Martin	<i>Donald Macleod</i>	203
As One with Authority: Reflective Leadership in Ministry, by Jackson W. Carroll	<i>John W. Stewart</i>	204
Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology: Some Thoughts on the Theology of Worship, by Hughes Oliphant Old	<i>Elsie McKee</i>	206
Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula, by Ruth C. Duck	<i>Nancy Ann Dallavalle</i>	207
Birthings and Blessings: Liberating Worship Services for the Inclusive Church, by Rosemary Catalano Mitchell and Gail Anderson Ricciuti	<i>Ruth C. Duck</i>	209
The Woman in the Pulpit, by Carol M. Norén	<i>Leonora Tubbs Tisdale</i>	210
Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized, by William H. Willimon	<i>Charles L. Rice</i>	212
Preaching the Topical Sermon, by Ronald J. Allen	<i>Thomas G. Long</i>	214
Speaking from the Heart: Preaching with Passion, by Richard Ward	<i>Charles L. Bartow</i>	216
Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil, by Christine M. Smith	<i>Carol M. Norén</i>	217
Pew Rights: For People Who Listen to Sermons, by Roger E. Van Harn	<i>Lawrence W. Farris</i>	219

Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method, by Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore	<i>Carol Lakey Hess</i>	220
Christian Parenting: Raising Children in the Real World, by Donna Sinclair and Yvonne Stewart	<i>Carol A. Wehrheim</i>	222
New Adam: The Future of Male Spirituality, by Philip Culbertson	<i>Bradley Wigger</i>	223
The Skilled Pastor: Counseling as the Practice of Theology, by Charles W. Taylor	<i>LeRoy Aden</i>	224
Mission Adventures in Many Lands, by J. Lawrence Driskill	<i>Robert L. McIntire</i>	225
The Clown in the Belfry: Writings on Faith and Fiction, by Frederick Buechner	<i>Thomas G. Long</i>	226

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Theology and Science: The Quest for a New Apologetics

by J. WENTZEL VAN HUYSSTEEN

J. Wentzel van Huyssteen is the first James I. McCord Professor of Theology and Science at Princeton Seminary. He received his D.Th. from the Free University of Amsterdam and comes to Princeton from South Africa where he served as Professor of Religious Studies and Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Port Elizabeth, as minister of the Dutch Reformed Church of Noorder-Paarl, and as Lecturer at Huguenot College, Wellington. Among his numerous publications are five books, including Theology and the Justification of Faith and The Realism of the Text. His inaugural lecture was given in Miller Chapel on February 10, 1993.

MR. PRESIDENT, Mr. Dean, my wife Hester, distinguished colleagues, students, and friends:

Thank you, Mr. President, for your introduction and your welcoming words. I would like to add my own warm welcome to everyone who is here today from our Seminary community, and also to colleagues and dear friends from Princeton University, the Center of Theological Inquiry, and the Institute for Advanced Studies.

It was exactly two years ago this month that Dr. Gillespie called me on a warm, humid February evening in Port Elizabeth, South Africa with the news that the Board of Trustees had appointed me to be the first occupant of the recently established James I. McCord Chair in Theology and Science at this seminary. That single telephone call irrevocably changed our lives, and also the lives of our children and family. Today Hester, Nina, and I can look back on our first year in the United States and in Princeton. In spite of an often difficult and even painful transition, we have been overwhelmed by the warm way in which we were welcomed to this community. We are deeply appreciative of this, and also for your faith in, and your remarkable vision of the way that theology and the sciences today move on the cutting edge of the Christian dialogue with our contemporary culture.

OUR PRESENT CHALLENGE

For those who are serious about living the Christian faith in the context of our contemporary postmodern world, the task of doing theology in a way that might really make a difference presents itself as a daunting and even confusing challenge. Deeply affected by contemporary cultural and political

issues, by the successes of the natural sciences and technology and especially the pervasive presence of the psychological and social sciences in our daily lives, this challenge translates as follows: Do we still have good reasons to stay convinced that the heart of the Christian message does indeed provide the most adequate interpretation of our experience with our world, our culture(s), and ourselves? Put in a different way, does the postmodern world, with its radical religious and cultural pluralism, its spectacular technology, and its values that also force us to confront the realities of environmental destruction and political, economic, racial, and sexual injustice, still ultimately make sense in the light of Sinai and Calvary?

Our world has, of course, been fundamentally changed by an all-pervasive scientific culture that shapes the rationality of the way we live our daily lives. The advent of modern thought has in fact led to an unparalleled transformation in the way we as human beings have come to regard the natural world and our relation to it. In a way it could even be argued that, in the history of Western thought, the advent of scientific culture outshines everything since the rise of Christianity.¹

Today theologians and scientists, whether they agree or not, and whether they even talk or not, are together in their awe for the way the powers of human reason and imagination manage far to exceed our demands for biological survival, and for the extraordinary ability of the human mind to represent aspects of the world that are inaccessible to our ordinary senses. But scientists are also teaching theologians something today: the baffling and puzzling incompleteness of all our attempts at finding meaning and intelligibility in our world. Our knowledge of the natural world stretches out in two directions: to the basic constituents of physical reality on the one hand and to the higher levels of biological complexity on the other.² We should indeed be in awe in the face of the amazing and inventive creativity of the world in which we have evolved: the elusive and unpicturable basic subatomic entities out of which everything is made, including ourselves, have potentialities unknown and indescribable in terms of the physics that discovers and the mathematics that symbolizes them. Therefore, at both the extremes of our comprehension—the subatomic and the personal—we face such baffling depths that even scientists today speak of the mystery of the universe.

Arthur Peacocke has recently convincingly argued for the merging of this

¹ Cf. Arthur R. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural and Divine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 27.

² Cf. Peacocke, p. 82.

search for intelligibility with the search for ultimate meaning in life.³ Science today forces us to contemplate the future of our planet since we have to reckon with its certain disappearance. The energy of our sun, which sustains life on earth, is finite: the sun is about halfway through its life and the time left for the existence of the earth is about the same as the length of time it has already existed. Thus, the demise of all life on earth, including our lives as humans, is really quite certain. Science today therefore forces us to ask: what is the meaning of this universe and of our presence in it? These are the ultimate questions that bring theology and science closer together, for they are questions that cannot be answered through the resources of science alone. Thus, the scientifically observed and understood character of the natural world, including our existence as human beings, is today of immense theological importance; for what nature is like, what the meaning of human life is, what God is like, indeed whether or not God exists, have become questions that are so interlocked that they cannot be considered in isolation anymore.

For theology today, an all-important focus of its dialogue with our contemporary culture is therefore not only the tremendous problems that would arise if theology should choose to retreat to the insular comfort of an exclusivist theological confessionalism, but also and precisely its uneasy relationship with the sciences. In fact, as theologians we find ourselves confronted with a special challenge: First, we have to try our best to keep together, in a meaningful whole, a very specific sense of continuity with the Christian tradition and a respect for religious and cultural pluralism, as well as a resisting of any form of political or confessional authoritarianism.⁴ Second, postmodern thought also challenges us to explore again the presupposed continuity between Christian theology and the general human enterprise of understanding the world rationally.

In trying to do this, however, we soon discover that not only theology, but also the sciences have been profoundly influenced by our postmodern culture. This gives an unexpected and complicating twist to the centuries-old theology-and-science problem: not only theology, but also postmodern science and philosophy of science have moved away quite dramatically from positivist and technocentric conceptions of scientific rationality with their closely aligned beliefs in linear progress, guaranteed success, deterministic predictability, absolute truths, and some uniform, standardized form of

³ Peacocke, pp. 83ff.

⁴ Cf. Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), pp. 31ff.

knowledge. Some contemporary philosophers of science now argue for a postmodern philosophy of science that, along with feminist interpretations of science, focuses on trust in local scientific practice while, at the same time, rejecting all global interpretations of science.⁵ This kind of postmodernism in science not only sharply deconstructs and rejects the autonomy and cultural dominance of especially the natural sciences in our time, but seriously challenges any attempt to develop a meaningful and intelligible relationship between science and Christian theology today.

In certain significant ways postmodernism, with its clear-cut option for pluralism and diversity,⁶ seems therefore to leave both theology and science fragmented. And this seems to be the perplexing challenge with which we have to deal: Is it at all possible to relate meaningfully the fragmented, specialized world of contemporary science to the equally fragmented intellectual world of contemporary theology? In spite of its postmodern guise, the theology-and-science problem has of course been with the Christian church for centuries. In his important publication, *Creation and the History of Science*,⁷ Christopher Kaiser recently argued that the problem of the God-and-science relationship in the Judeo-Christian context goes back at least as far as the second century B.C. This essentially grew into the enduring question: Can Christians reconcile their faith in God with their scientific work in the laboratory?

In addition to this, it is well known that theology has been fundamentally influenced by both the philosophical cosmology of the ancient world and the scientific discoveries of our time. Also the natural sciences, however, have been seriously influenced by theological presuppositions throughout history: from the days of the early church, through the revival of Aristotelian thought in the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern science in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, up to post-Newtonian mechanics in the nineteenth century with its conclusions ultimately in the theological implications of the thoughts of the founders of twentieth-century physics, Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein. From the beginning of the Christian era to the late eighteenth century, an operational faith in God as Creator certainly was an essential factor in the development of all branches of science. This created

⁵ Cf. Joseph Rouse, "The Politics of Postmodern Philosophy of Science," *Philosophy of Science* 58 (1991): 607-627.

⁶ Cf. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 9ff.

⁷ Christopher Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991).

a kind of matrix in which theologians and scientists could coexist in a way that we can only dream about today.

The nineteenth century, with the triumph of individualism in religion and professionalism in science, obviously changed all that when science, under the surge of Darwinism, moved away from theology rather dramatically. Even in our complex world today, however, Christian theologians who are looking for ways to interpret the idea of creation meaningfully, still hang on to some very basic commitments: the ideas that nature is intelligible, that nature is relatively autonomous, and that reality, as created by God, has some intrinsic unity as God's creation. For many in the contemporary theology-and-science debate, especially with the abandonment very often of the traditional idea of a Creator God, this has become a driving force behind all their reflection: Even if the origin of the cosmos may ultimately be unintelligible, nature itself is eminently intelligible and reflects the same rationality as the human mind. Human intelligence in the end seems to go hand in hand with an intelligible universe. Moreover, an act of faith always seems necessary for the scientist too: a commitment to the metaphysical belief that the world is intelligible and open to rational exploration.⁸

A fundamental commitment to this kind of intelligibility has no doubt been the impetus behind an intense revival of worldwide academic interest in the troubled relationship between theology and science, especially during the past decade. In the United States, such institutions as the Center of Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley, the Institute for Religion in an Age of Science, the Chicago Center for Religion and Science, and, in Princeton, the Center of Theological Inquiry have certainly become leaders in the task of nurturing the emerging discipline and various centers of theology and science, and also in introducing it in the podiums of the American Academy of Religion and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Princeton Theological Seminary followed suit by establishing the first, and at this point in time, the only chair in theology and science in the world. In all of these instances, the ground-breaking work of American and British scholars like Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke, John Polkinghorne, and Thomas Torrance is being carefully analyzed and built upon by a host of younger scholars in fields as diverse as philosophical theology, philosophy of science, cosmology, evolutionary biology, neurobiology, genetics, physics, astrophysics, quantum physics, ecology, biochemistry, anthropology, technology, and the cognitive and social sciences.

⁸ Cf. John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: The Relationship between Science and Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), p. 49.

THE QUEST FOR INTELLIGIBILITY

In spite of this tremendous diversity, the theology-and-science debate today is dominated and held together by an inspiring quest for intelligibility. Most of us would agree that God transcends our final grasp, and that encounters with God obviously involve deeper levels than that of the rational, enquiring mind alone. But, as many scientists and theologians today will acknowledge, the quest for intelligibility, or the search for understanding at the deepest possible level, will be incomplete if it does not include within itself the religious quest for ultimate meaning, purpose, and significance.

This mutual quest for intelligibility has not only created exciting new areas of discussion between theology and science, but also again brought theology and science closer together. In this mutual quest for intelligibility and consonance scientists, philosophers, and theologians in the field increasingly realize that both theology and science are responses to the way things are: both appeal to the coherent intelligibility that each achieves through its insights. Each can be seen as an attempt to understand our world of experience and, in the light of this experience, to establish possible points of contact and also possible points of conflict. In this sense theology and science can indeed be seen as mutually illuminating approaches to one and the same reality. For this reason the current debate between theology and the sciences converges on the understanding of the human person as a psychosomatic unity in both science and religion, and on the integration of evolutionary-biological ideas with a sense of God as a transcendent but also an immanent, ever-working Creator. Roger Trigg recently argued that it is no more a miracle that the human mind can understand the world than that the human eye can see it: evolution in a sense explains both, and also demonstrates why we are so at home in the world and why superior intelligence corresponds with a highly intelligible world.⁹ For the same reason, so much of the current debate focuses on relating the origins of our cosmos, in the light of contemporary astrophysics and cosmology, to the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation. Not just questions about such matters as the theological significance of the Big Bang theory, but also the implications of the novel features of quantum physics and relativity are now part of the daily and ongoing discussion of those who are working in theology and science.

The current theology-and-science discussion thus very much presents itself as contemporary apologetics for the Christian faith, and as such it will

⁹ Cf. Roger Trigg, *Reality at Risk: A Defence of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences* (Sussex, England: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 212.

fundamentally shape our expression of the Christian experience of God. It also shapes our intellectual expression of the Christian faith and cautions us to greater epistemological and methodological sophistication. Theologians, however, will have to be careful to protect the integrity and unique character of theological reflection in this important discussion. And, maybe more importantly, theologians will have to be extra careful not to create the impression that while science appears to be very rational and open to correction, theology seems always to be ready to play the trump card of unquestionable and self-authenticating revelation. Indeed, in the case of the natural sciences we are offered knowledge of what the physical world might really be like: science here imposes conditions or constraints that theologians should respect when they give accounts of what is regarded as God's relationship to this world.

THEOLOGY, SCIENCE, AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The question how theology and science should relate to one another is, of course, neither a theological nor a scientific issue. It is, rather, an epistemological issue, that is, an issue about how two very different claims to knowledge are to be related.¹⁰ What is at stake here is basically the nature of knowledge, and the way it presents itself in the often very divergent claims resulting from religious and scientific worldviews. Our conviction that our world is highly intelligible, however, at least partly motivates us to search for some form of unified theory. There is no way that we could be content with a plurality of unrelated languages if they are in fact languages about the same world—especially if we are seeking a coherent interpretation of all experience.¹¹ In our attempt to integrate a single worldview that would incorporate both theology and science, the obvious question is therefore going to be: what is the status of scientific claims about our cosmos, and what sort of knowledge claims, if any, do we make in theology? If, furthermore, any form of “revelation” is to be seen as the basis of religious knowledge claims, what kind of knowledge do we have here? What is more, is it at all possible—or even desirable—that our theological perspectives may be able to assist us, for instance, in choosing between different scientific theories that may be more or less compatible with biblical worldviews?

The complexity of these issues is very well illustrated when, for a mo-

¹⁰ Cf. Ernan McMullin, “How Should Cosmology Relate to Theology?” in *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Arthur R. Peacocke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 26.

¹¹ Cf. Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 16.

ment, we briefly look at the history of the relationship between scientific cosmology and the Christian doctrine of creation. At the beginning of the early medieval period Jews, Christians, and Moslems were agreed on at least one theological "given": the universe had a beginning in time. This, of course, was based on the Genesis story of the creation, and Augustine, who in principle was willing to take the road of metaphor to avoid any conflict with "demonstrated truths," was keen to show that there was no conflict here: creation was seen as a single timeless act through which time itself came to be.¹²

The rediscovery of Aristotle, however, first in Islam and then in the Latin West, introduced a new challenge to the doctrine of creation. Aristotle had argued strongly that neither matter nor time could have a beginning. This led to a serious confrontation between a "pagan" cosmology and Christian theology which, as Ernan McMullin argues, brought about the most serious intellectual crisis the church had faced in almost a thousand years.¹³ In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council attacked the Aristotelian position and defined it as a doctrine of faith that the universe had a beginning in time. Later, Aquinas would show that neither side of the debate could be demonstrated philosophically. With the coming of the "new science" in the seventeenth century, however, the terms of the debate changed when Newton's mechanics appeared to allow for a compromise position: the absolutes of space and time were without beginning, but also without content. Creation meant that God brought matter to be within the confines of space at a finite time in the past.

However, the numerous traces of historical development on the earth's surface (eventually followed by the establishment of geology as a new science at the University of Cambridge in 1870) and the discovery later of the second law of thermodynamics made the Aristotelian notion of an unchanging, eternal cosmos seem quite implausible.¹⁴ Even later Einstein's general theory of relativity, combined with Hubble's 1929 discovery of the galactic red shift led to the widely acclaimed postulate of an expanding universe, or the so-called Big Bang theory, according to which a singularity is postulated about fifteen billion years ago, from which the expansion of our universe began. The importance of the Big Bang theory is easily recognized: for the first time physics was led by its own resources to something that sounded

¹² Cf. McMullin, "Cosmology," p. 28.

¹³ McMullin, "Cosmology," pp. 29-30.

¹⁴ Cf. McMullin, "Cosmology," p. 30.

like a beginning of time.¹⁵ This was followed by theological responses that ranged from positions like that of Pope Pius XII who hailed the theory as unqualified support for the Christian idea of creation, to rejection because it either looked too much like creation or conflicted with the fundamentalist or literalist notion of a creation a few thousand years ago. It is clear, however, that none of these positions takes the complexities of the relationship between scientific and theological epistemology into consideration at all. Not only can the Big Bang not automatically be assumed to be either the beginning of time or of the universe, nor can it be taken for granted that the lapse of time since the so-called Big Bang is necessarily the age of the universe.¹⁶ The Big Bang theory and scientific cosmology in general—as Willem Drees has recently pointed out—are not in the first place about the origin of the universe, but rather about its subsequent evolution. Stephen Hawking's question, "did the universe have a beginning, and what is the nature of time?"¹⁷ thus has to be very carefully defined both scientifically and theologically. But in the same careful way we have to realize that the intent of, for instance, the Genesis passages is to underline the dependence of an intelligible and contingent universe on a Creator,¹⁸ and not necessarily to specify a first moment in time, at least in the technical sense of contemporary cosmology.

This example from the history of Western thought alerts us to the epistemological fallacy of directly inferring from contemporary science to theological doctrine. It would be a serious category mistake to infer directly from, for example, the Big Bang to creation, from field theory to the Spirit of God, from chance to providence, from entropy to evil, or from the anthropic principle to design. The Big Bang model, for instance, does not entitle us to infer—theologically or scientifically—an absolute beginning in time. On the other hand, there is nothing scientifically or philosophically inadmissible about the idea that an absolute beginning might have occurred. And if it did occur, it could look something like the horizon-event described by the Big Bang theory. To describe this horizon-event as "the creation," however, is to explain it in terms of a cause that would not be scientific anymore.

¹⁵ Cf. Willem B. Drees, *Beyond the Big Bang: Quantum Cosmologies and God* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1990), pp. 17ff., 211ff.

¹⁶ Cf. McMullin, "Cosmology," p. 35.

¹⁷ Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 1.

¹⁸ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), p. 95.

What could a theologian then rightly infer from this highly successful theory? It would be possible to say, theologically, that if our universe had a beginning in time through the unique act of a creator, from *our* point of view it would look something like what the Big Bang cosmologists are talking about. What one cannot say is that the doctrine of creation "supports" the Big Bang model, or that the Big Bang "supports" the Christian doctrine of creation.¹⁹ As Christians we should therefore take very seriously the theories of physics and biology, not to exploit or to try and change them, but to try to find interpretations that would suggest consonance with the Christian viewpoint. Theology can, therefore, never claim to be capable of scientific theory appraisal, but should rather be seen as one element in the constructing of a broader cultural worldview.²⁰ The Christian can never separate her or his science from her or his theology, but she or he should learn to distrust epistemological shortcuts from the one to the other. One way to do this would be to find a paradigm that would yield a fine-tuned epistemological consonance.

Thus are revealed the philosophical and epistemological complexities involved in trying to relate theology and science today. In fact, I think it is safe to say that until fairly recently, especially theological discussions on the relationship between theological and scientific epistemology have been notoriously vague, imprecise and even confused. Since the Enlightenment and the days of Immanuel Kant, right through to the thought of D. F. Strauss, Feuerbach, Freud, and Marx, science was seen to be in conflict with religion, in fact as the great alternative to religion. This inevitably led, as is well known, to the stark opposition of a foundationalist empiricist/positivist conception of science to an equally foundationalist conception of biblical literalism. This also reveals that genuine conflicts between science and theology are exceedingly difficult to detect and specify accurately. In retrospect many of these serious clashes turn out to be not between religion and science, but between incompatible, even incommensurable worldviews or philosophies.²¹

The current focus on the relationship between theology and science—some prefer to talk of the emerging discipline of theology and science—suggests, however, a fall from epistemological innocence regarding this complex and fascinating issue. For the philosophical theologian this presents

¹⁹ Cf. McMullin, "Cosmology," p. 39.

²⁰ Cf. McMullin, "Cosmology," p. 51.

²¹ Cf. Nicholas Lash, "Production and Prospect: Reflections on Christian Hope and Original Sin," in *Evolution and Creation*, ed. Ernan McMullin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 277.

a challenge to his or her personal commitments and beliefs, a challenge that also implies a quest for a plausible model of theological contextuality, because it thrusts to the front questions about the status of religious claims to knowledge and about the rationality of belief in God.

Currently, however, the relationship of theology and science is indeed still as vague and confusing as ever. Some see them as fundamentally in conflict with one another, others as independent of one another, others as in creative dialogue and consonance with one another, while still other thinkers want to integrate theology and science in terms of either a theology of nature or some form of natural theology.²²

FOUNDATIONALISM IN THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

What we are certain about today at least is that in any contemporary evaluation of the relationship between theology and science, a foundationalist view of either science or theology would be epistemologically fatal. Foundationalism holds that, in the process of justifying our knowledge claims, the chain of justifying evidence cannot go on *ad infinitum* if we are ever to be in a position to claim that we have justified our knowledge.²³ Thus, foundationalists specify what they take to be the ultimate foundations on which the evidential support systems for various beliefs are constructed. The sorts of features most frequently mentioned are self-evidence, incorrigibility, being evident to the senses, indubitability, and being self-authenticating and properly basic, that is, foundational.

Foundationalism, as the thesis that our beliefs can be warranted or justified by appealing to some item of knowledge that is self-evident or beyond doubt, certainly eliminates any possibility of discovering a meaningful epistemological link between theology and the other sciences. To claim that knowledge rests on foundations is to claim that there is a privileged class of beliefs that are intrinsically credible and, therefore, able to serve as ultimate terminating points for chains of justification. These "givens" could be anything from sense data to universals, essences, experience, and God's revelation. In this sense the "doctrine of the given" can indeed be called the comrade-in-arms of all foundationalism.²⁴ In the natural sciences, foundationalism implies a positivist empiricism or scientific materialism that per definition renders all religion, and certainly all theology and theological re-

²² Cf. Barbour, pp. 1-30.

²³ Cf. Axel D. Steuer, "The Epistemic Status of Theistic Belief," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (1987): 237.

²⁴ Cf. Nancy Frankenberry, *Religion and Radical Empiricism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 6.

flection, meaningless.²⁵ In theology, foundationalism implies biblical literalism, or on a much more sophisticated level, a self-authenticating "positivism of revelation" that isolates theology because it denies the crucial role of interpreted religious experience in all theological reflection. Here the theologian is left speaking a language whose conceptuality might be internally coherent but is at the same time powerless to communicate its content because it is unrelated to all nontheological discourse.²⁶

Philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Thomas S. Kuhn, and Richard Rorty today represent a strong nonfoundational response to traditional epistemological questions. Instead of a model of knowledge as an entity resting on fixed and immutable foundations, they offer a picture of human knowledge as an evolving social phenomenon within a web of beliefs. Belief systems are here discovered within a contextual matrix that is itself groundless. Justification becomes a matter of accommodating those beliefs that are being questioned to another body of accepted beliefs. Whatever theories we might have about anything that might be "given" in religious or scientific experience, epistemic justification will not have an unproblematic, uninterpreted "given" at its foundation. With this in mind it not only becomes clear that in theology all forms of foundationalism and fideism go hand in hand, but also that nonfoundationalism will present a very special challenge to the Christian concept of revelation.

Neither theology nor science, then, is based on incontrovertible grounds of knowledge. Each demands a commitment to a corrigible point of view and to the fact that an element of the unexplained will always remain.²⁷ Both theology and science, furthermore, have to speak of entities that are not directly observable; both must therefore be prepared to use models and metaphors as heuristic devices. This is also the context within which John Polkinghorne can state that mathematics is the natural language of physical science, while symbol and metaphor can be seen as the natural language for theology.²⁸

The epistemological move beyond foundationalism in science points to the biggest revolution in physics since the days of Newton: the discovery of the elusive and fitful subatomic world of quantum theory. Here our world has been proved to be strange beyond our powers of anticipation. If this is

²⁵ Cf. Barbour, p. 4.

²⁶ Cf. Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 34.

²⁷ Robert J. Russell, "Cosmology, Creation and Contingency," in *Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance*, ed. Ted Peters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 201.

²⁸ Polkinghorne, p. 2.

true for physics, it undoubtedly can be true for theology as well. The quantum world exhibits a counterintuitive nonlocality, a togetherness-in-separation that provides a powerful image of holistic solidarity, which may even be a suggestive consonant image for the field of theology. Quantum theory has indeed taught us to be open to the totally unexpected, even to the initially apparently unintelligible.²⁹

To reject foundationalism in theology, however, is not to embrace non- or antifoundationalism per se, in any case not a type of antifoundationalism that claims that one can engage in theological reflection without attention to the explanatory nature and epistemic status of theological truth claims. In fact, it could be convincingly shown that the whole debate between foundationalism and antifoundationalism is based on the false dichotomy of an outdated epistemological dilemma.³⁰ Moreover, a postfoundationalist shift to a fallibilist epistemology, which honestly embraces the role of traditioned experience, personal commitment, interpretation, and the provisional nature of all of our knowledge claims, avoids the alleged necessity of opting for either foundationalism or antifoundationalism.

Leaving behind the dichotomy that framed the older faith/reason debate now opens the way to a postmodern holist epistemology that may have a major influence on theological methodology. It is no longer necessary to hold that the traditional project of theological prolegomena is always ancillary to theology, functioning (as in fundamental theology) as a foundation to be dealt with prior to theological reflection and then always assumed in what follows.³¹ In a postfoundationalist theology the epistemological link between theology and the other sciences can be left open because the project of theological methodology and "prolegomena" now becomes part of theological reflection as such, that is, as part of an ongoing interdisciplinary inquiry within the practice of theology itself.

THE SHAPING OF RATIONALITY IN THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

What will be needed in this interdisciplinary theology-and-science discussion is a methodological approach that not only recognizes theology as an explanatory discipline, but also takes seriously the epistemological prob-

²⁹ Cf. Polkinghorne, pp. 3ff.

³⁰ Cf. Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); also Philip Clayton, *Explanation from Physics to Theology: An Essay in Rationality and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 152.

³¹ Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Theology and the Justification of Faith: The Construction of Theories in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), p. xi.

lem of the shaping of rationality in theology and science, the hermeneutical problem of relating context and meaning, the explanatory role of religious experience and beliefs, and the fallibilist and provisional nature of both theological and scientific truth claims. To this end the discussion of the problem of rationality in contemporary philosophy of science has recently more and more proved to be an important guide to theology, and perhaps the most fruitful theology-and-science link to date. This discussion not only opens up broader definitions of rationality and indicates the sort of criteria needed to govern theological assertions, it also highlights the centrality of experiential and practical factors in rational explanation and therefore in rationality in general. For this reason the recovery of the hermeneutical dimension in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and theology focuses on a postempiricist conception of science in which science is understood as a historically dynamic process in which there are conflicting and competing paradigm theories, research programs, and research traditions.³²

The problem of the shaping of rationality in theology to a great extent centers on the possible role of explanatory justification in theological thought and will therefore eventually force us to address the difficult epistemological issues of degrees of truth and the objectivity—if any!—of our statements. Generally speaking, the nature of rationality consists of the intelligent pursuit of certain epistemic values, of which intelligibility is the most important. Theology obviously shares the quest for intelligibility with all other sciences, whatever the differences or similarities between theology and the other sciences might be.

Now, if rationality is a means to the goals of science³³ and as such primarily consists of pursuing intelligibility by making the most progressive theory choices,³⁴ intelligibility itself can be seen as a quest for understanding at the deepest possible level. In theology, as in the other sciences, this will be attained by inferring—through evaluation and argument—to the best possible explanations. Rationality is thus primarily shaped by the quest for intelligibility, and in theology this intelligibility is attained through the explanatory role of religious experience and beliefs in our theological reflection. In both theology and science we therefore should beware of an overly narrow and rationalistic conception of rationality. Rationality as such

³² Cf. Bernstein, pp. 171-172.

³³ Cf. Ernan McMullin, *The Shaping of Scientific Rationality: Construction and Constraint* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 25.

³⁴ Cf. Larry Laudan, *Progress and Its Problems: Towards a Theory of Scientific Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 121ff.

is complex, many sided, extensive, and as wide ranging as the domain of intelligence itself.

Following the lead of Nicholas Rescher we can now identify at least three contexts of rationality that are highly relevant not only for theology, but also for the social, human, and natural sciences: the cognitive context, the evaluative context, and the pragmatic context.³⁵ What this means for theological reflection is that also in theology we have good reasons for hanging on to certain beliefs, good reasons for making certain moral choices, and good reasons for acting in certain ways. Within a holistic epistemology these three contexts go together as a seamless whole and also can be regarded as the three resources for rationality in theology. They merge in the common task of uniting the best reasons for belief, evaluation, and action. We therefore act rationally in matters of belief, action, and evaluation when our reasons "hang together," that is, are cogent. In theology, rationality implies the capacity to "give account," to provide a rationale for the way one thinks, chooses, acts, and believes. Theory acceptance, then, has an epistemic dimension. When we ask, however, what else other than belief is involved in theory acceptance, the pragmatic and evaluative dimensions of theory acceptance are revealed.³⁶

In both theology and science, rationality therefore pivots on the deployment of good reasons: believing, doing, and choosing the right thing for the right reasons. Being rational is therefore not just a matter of having some reasons for what one believes in and argues for, but having the best or strongest reasons to support the rationality of one's beliefs within a concrete context. Rationality in theology and science, as we saw earlier, is shaped primarily by the quest for intelligibility. And this understanding at the deepest possible level is attained by inferring to the best possible explanations. In this sense rationality and explanation go together very closely.

The hazy intersection between the diverse fields of theology and the other sciences is therefore not in the first place to be determined by exploring methodological parallels or degrees of consonance between theology and the sciences. What should be explored first is the epistemological question of the nature and status of explanations and explanatory claims in theology and the other sciences, since theological doctrines and constructs, as well as scientific theories, aim at giving the best possible explanations in their respective fields. In this reflection we should be wary of dangerous epistemological

³⁵ Nicholas Rescher, *Rationality: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Nature and the Rationale of Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

³⁶ Bas C. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 3ff.

shortcuts: rationality should never be reduced to scientific rationality, and scientific rationality should never be reduced to natural scientific rationality.

EXPLANATIONS IN THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

In theological explanations religious beliefs play a central role. Religious beliefs, of course, have important functions for the believer. They describe the rites and practices of believing communities, express in the language of faith psychological and sociological needs, and also answer philosophical questions in religious terms. In short, religious beliefs help to explain the world and the place of believers in it. In doing this, religious beliefs reflect a general sense of meaningfulness on the part of the believer, a meaningfulness that extends from an existential level to the level of particular theories and dogmas.³⁷ But of central importance among the various functions of religious beliefs is that of explanation.

The question that now arises is whether there is a unitary theory of explanation that would allow us to speak of explanation in the singular when referring to the broader spectrum of academic disciplines. Eventually it will become clear that there are important parallels between explanation in the sciences and in theology. However significant these parallels might be, religious and theological explanations do have unique aspects as well: they are normally all-encompassing and deeply personal, they often arise from vague and elusive questions concerning the meaning of life, and as religious answers they provide ultimate meaning in life. Religious—and eventually theological—explanations thus provide a context of security for the believer and also involve a faith commitment to God. This implies that both the scope and content of theological explanations may set them apart from explanations in other areas. In assessing the explanatory role of religious experience and beliefs we therefore should assess the continuities as well as the discontinuities between theological and other types of explanations. Scientific explanations, of course, are never completely impersonal, but they are capable of achieving a high degree of interpersonal agreement. Art and ethics are much more personal than science and as such may not represent areas in which universal agreement is attainable. Even more personal is the realm of religious experience, where also the refracting influence of culture is powerfully present.³⁸

The central goal of natural-scientific theories is to explain the empirical world. To call an explanation "scientific" is to say that the explanation

³⁷ Cf. Clayton, pp. 1-2.

³⁸ Cf. Polkinghorne, p. 54.

draws on science for its information, and that the criteria of evaluation of how good an explanation it is are being applied, using a scientific theory.³⁹ Theories of explanation, however, have been directly influenced by important shifts in the problem of natural-scientific rationality, especially since the advent of Thomas S. Kuhn's revolutionary paradigm theory.⁴⁰ This contextualist shift in the philosophy of the natural sciences clearly indicates that a very specific hermeneutical awareness as well as the realization that criteria for explanation function only within a particular paradigm. Seen in the light of this contextualist shift, explanations in science are relativized and become an element within the broader hermeneutical task of science.⁴¹

In the social and human sciences a long and learned tradition has opposed explanation to empathic understanding. Explanation in the social sciences, however, does not need to be downplayed in the light of the broader hermeneutical purpose of the social and human sciences. It also would be incorrect to claim that, because of its subject matter, the social and human sciences are more subjective than the natural sciences: the role of subjective factors in the formulation of natural as well as social-scientific explanations is today widely accepted. Eventually we shall see that not only in theology, but also in the social, human, and natural sciences, the subjectivity of interpreting belongs right in the heart of the explanatory task. On another level the explanatory task in the social sciences is closer to explanations in theology than to explanations in the natural sciences. Both in the social and human sciences and in theology the object of research is itself already symbolically structured, mainly as a result of a long and ongoing history of interpretation. Therefore, if all science then is hermeneutical, in the human and social sciences, and especially in the history of theological ideas, we encounter what some scholars have called a "double hermeneutic" of having to interpret again the already interpreted world of our experience.⁴²

From this we may conclude that explanation—whether in the natural, social, or human sciences or in theology—is always a form of rational reconstruction, that rational thought is never purely objective, that context greatly influences the interpretative theoretical process, and that any research program and its explanations can only be partially evaluated at any given time. And in our quest for intelligibility, coherence—although a necessary criterion for rational thought—can by itself never be a sufficient condition for

³⁹ Cf. van Fraassen, p. 156.

⁴⁰ Cf. van Huyssteen, pp. 47-70.

⁴¹ Cf. Clayton, p. 39.

⁴² Cf. Clayton, p. 88.

the stories in which we articulate our hope and symbolically unify our fragmented experience.⁴³

Our quest for some form of epistemological consonance between theology and science thus brings us to philosophical explanations. Philosophical explanations, like other explanations, aim to address and answer coherently some specific question. They are philosophical in that they are not limited in scope to any particular discipline or aspect of experience.⁴⁴ In trying to understand the explanatory role of religious experiences and the beliefs that constitute them, it is important to note that religious explanations share some very significant features with philosophical explanations. The most important of these are their greater generality or depth and an emphasis on systematic coherence and meaningfulness.

For philosophical and religious (and eventually also theological) explanations, both the context principle of rationality and the coherence theory of meaning are of prime importance. From the perspective of a coherence theory of meaning, a philosophical or a religious explanation is not all that different from other explanations. When, therefore, we reflect on a portion of our experience, it is possible to put this reflection on a problem within an ever-broadening horizon of contexts until we reach a context that reaches out to the whole of human experience. At this level one is involved in making sense of total experience, and this broadest context could be labeled metaphysical or religious. Within this broader context of religious experience, Philip Clayton⁴⁵ has recently identified at least three types or forms of explanation:

(1) Private explanations. These explanations are warranted solely by the fact that they make sense of experience for the individual believer. Private explanations can be quite comprehensive in scope and can account for broad areas of human experience, but the justification of these explanations is rooted in personal value alone.

(2) Communal explanations. Here the standards of adequate explanations are set by the particular believing and practicing community.

(3) Intersubjective or transcommunal explanations. This category of explanation supposes that religious beliefs can be justified in a way that transcends the boundaries of the individual religious community. Within the Christian community apologetics and natural theology fit this notion of transcommunal justification. Christian beliefs are held as a rational and best

⁴³ Cf. Lash, p. 277.

⁴⁴ Cf. Clayton, p. 104.

⁴⁵ Clayton, pp. 5, 113ff.

available explanation that the believer takes to have more than merely communal validity.

The importance of these distinctions for theology is apparent: any comparison between theology and science would be meaningful only if a form of transcommunal explanation is at least one viable form of epistemic justification in theological reflection.

As far as theological explanations go, theologians should first and foremost beware of the fideist misconstrual where faith is seen as evidence for the truth of religious or theological propositions. Faith—as the “heart” of religion—implies a total commitment to the object of one’s belief. In the context of rational argumentation, however, faith does not make the object of faith more probable and thus should not be seen as an epistemic virtue, nor, of course, as an epistemic vice.⁴⁶ It now becomes clear that the believer’s effort to understand and come to terms with her or his faith displays a structure quite similar to scientific rationality. Seen against this background theological explanations attempt to establish a link between the inherited beliefs and practices of a specific religious tradition and the contemporary experience of its adherents.⁴⁷ These explanations arise out of traditioned experience and can be phrased in terms of traditional doctrines, the practices (liturgies and rites) of a religious community, its norms or codes of behavior, or they can be constructed in terms of the broader intellectual, social, and ethical intersubjective life experience of believers.

As such, theological explanations function continually to insure a tradition’s relevance to the challenges posed by contemporary contextual questions. Clayton is therefore right when he states that theology is not primarily a descriptive (first order) but an explanatory (second order) endeavor. There are indeed good reasons for theology to pursue explanatory adequacy and academic excellence.⁴⁸ All theological explanations should therefore be open to intersubjective examination and criticism, which means that theological statements should at all times be construed as hypotheses.⁴⁹ And since all attempts to clarify Christian beliefs necessarily involve dependence on categories not drawn from the Christian tradition, as well as the use of general notions such as truth, meaning, coherence, and reference, Christian theology will always find itself in necessary discourse with other theologies and with the science and philosophy of its time.

⁴⁶ Cf. Clayton, p. 143.

⁴⁷ Cf. van Huyssteen, pp. 200ff.

⁴⁸ Clayton, p. 149.

⁴⁹ Cf. van Huyssteen, pp. 143ff.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would therefore like to claim that the quest for intelligibility and explanatory progress in theology is also dependent on the evolving nature of the epistemic values that have shaped theological rationality in history. This implies that the realist assumptions and commitments of experienced Christian faith are relevant epistemological issues to be dealt with seriously in the theology-and-science discussion. By doing this, theology could move away from the absolutism of foundationalism as well as from the relativism of antifoundationalism. This can further be achieved by showing that because theology is an activity of a community of inquirers, there can be no way to prescribe a rationality for that activity without considering its actual practice.

The theology-and-science discussion in a very specific way reveals how the explanatory role of interpreted experience in theology can only be adequately explained in terms of an experiential epistemology. This not only means that religious experience is better explained theologically, but that in explaining the role of experience, the philosophical theologian will have to move from the question of rationality to intelligibility, from intelligibility to the question of personal understanding, and from personal understanding to personal experience. This is something the scientist need never do. Dealing with personal commitment in this way may show that the rationality of theology is often shaped by epistemic values different from those of science. The dependence of theology on experiential adequacy for determining and maintaining its explanatory adequacy need, however, never again mean that theology is less rational or less contextual than science.

The nature of the ongoing discussion between theology and science should help us to realize that, in spite of a promising and emerging new field of study, the complex relationship between scientific and religious epistemology is more challenging than ever. This becomes all the more clear when we keep in mind not only the deconstruction and discovery of the limitations of the natural sciences in the post-Kuhnian era, but also when we focus carefully on the nature of the natural sciences. The sciences are eminently competent when it comes to theory construction and to experimental and pragmatic enterprises, but they are incompetent when it comes to finding answers to our deepest religious questions.

The fundamental differences between theology and science should therefore be respected, as well as the difference between different forms of explanations not only in the different sciences, but also between theology and the

other sciences. However, in spite of important differences and sometimes radically different levels of explanation, theology and science do share a common ground of rationality. A theology and a science that come to discover this mutual quest for intelligibility in spite of important differences will also be freed to discover that nothing that is part of, or the result of, natural scientific explanation need ever be logically incompatible with theological reflection. Stephen Hawking's disturbing question—what place would there be for a creator in a universe without a beginning in time?⁵⁰—could then be answered with: in principle, every possible place; a “place” that might even shatter all our conventional (and unconventional) models for depicting the transcendence and immanence of God. Whether the universe had a beginning in time or not does not affect our reading of the Genesis story in its depiction of the complete dependence of the universe on God. God is not a God of the gaps or a God of the edges⁵¹ but is the Christian theologian's answer to why there is something rather than nothing. Science can tell us little or nothing about our experience of subjectivity, about the astonishing emergence of personhood, and about why we have an intelligible universe. God is the name that we give to the best available explanation of all that is.⁵²

In focusing on the importance of the natural sciences, we should then have an openness for that which reaches beyond the world of the natural sciences, that is, to the world on which the social sciences, history, philosophy, and theology focus. In this wider context we could discover that theology and science share not only a mutually enriching quest for intelligibility, but also the importance of tradition and of the explanatory role of interpreted experience. An honest analysis of the differences between the sciences and between theological and scientific explanations might then yield more intelligibility in the apologetic attempt to understand our post-modern world as truly God's own world.

⁵⁰ Hawking, pp. 140-141.

⁵¹ Cf. Polkinghorne, p. 81.

⁵² Cf. Peacocke, p. 134.

Narratives of a Vulnerable God¹

by WILLIAM C. PLACHER

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SUPPOSE WE tried to put aside all our assumptions about God—the dictionary definitions, the cultural images, the patterns from the history of the world's religions. Suppose we began with just this: in Jesus, the carpenter's son from Nazareth, God was revealing God's own self to the world. What sort of God would that imply? If we believe in such a God, what sort of lives will we live?

My proposal in what follows is that this God is not primarily about power but about a willingness to be vulnerable in love, a willingness to risk suffering—a God, in Leonardo Boff's phrase, "weak in power but strong in love."² I want to argue for that conclusion in large part by attending to the shape of some biblical stories, especially that interrupted, disturbing text, the Gospel of Mark. The project thus has a particular content and a particular method: in content, some claims about divine vulnerability; in method, a use of the narrative shapes of Scripture in the doing of theology.

There is a sense—let me admit it at the outset—in which I am asking the impossible. We cannot really put aside all the images of God generated by the world's religions and philosophies, all the pictures that dominate our own cultural contexts. At most I can invite a kind of fictional thought experiment, a way of framing the question, a kind of obverse to Anselm's invitation to his readers to think about the atonement, "leaving Christ out of view (as if nothing had ever been known of him)."³ Where Anselm asked his audience to imagine putting Christ out of the picture, I am asking some-

¹ This essay is a slightly revised version of the first of the Stone Lectures, delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in February 1993. I am grateful to President Gillespie and the faculty of the Seminary for the invitation to deliver the lectures, and to the Seminary community for its generous response. Some of the probing questions that followed this lecture have generated some minor changes in it, and I hope to incorporate more of what I learned from my audience when this essay is published as part of a larger project.

² Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, trans. Patrick Hughes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), p. 27.

³ Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, preface.

thing like the reverse—to put aside everything but Christ. But that much, the attempted thought experiment, I do ask, and with a sense of urgency.

I

We live in a culture that too often thinks it knows about God, even in the midst of its disbelief and cynicism—thinks it knows what power means and knows that God is about power, just as individual human success is about wealth and a successful career, just as national greatness is about military triumph. Somehow, if we are to hear the gospel, we need to break free of a good bit of cultural baggage, reject as Barmen did the claims of other “events and powers, figures and truths” to be God’s revelation, in favor of “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture . . . the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to obey in life and in death.”⁴ To hear and obey that word is to turn away from many of the voices that accost us from all sides, even many of the voices that claim most passionately to be talking to us about God.

Such tension with the dominant culture is of course nothing new for Christian faith. The Hellenistic world into which Christianity was expanding when the Gospels were written knew little agreement about the nature of the divine. The myths of Greece and Rome themselves gave conflicting signals, and Judaism, the cult of the Great Mother, the worship of Mithras, god of soldiers, and much more were entering the empire from the East. Stoic philosophers spoke of a divine Providence that watches over us, while the Epicureans believed that the gods, like good Epicureans, pursued their own affairs in indifference to the world. The first Christian missionaries, travelling about the Hellenistic world, could not take for granted any shared assumptions about the nature of divinity.

In that culture as in ours, however, many did assume that God above all means power—sometimes power pure and simple, with a frankness that makes us cringe. In *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus had told how Zeus condemned Prometheus to horrible torment because he had dared to show compassion for humankind and drove Io off to a life of dreadful suffering mostly just to cover up the fact that he had raped her. The opening chorus asks,

⁴ “The Theological Declaration of Barmen,” in *Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], 1991) 8.11–12. “When nothing else was left for the Church, the one Word of God who is called Jesus Christ remained. . . . The Word of God still remained, in spite of everything, in the same Church in which it had been so often denied and betrayed.” Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, pt. 1, trans. T.H.L. Parker et al. (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 176.

Who of the gods is so hard of heart,
 that he finds joy in this? . . .
 save only Zeus? For he malignantly
 always cherishing a mind
 that bends not, has subdued the breed
 of Ouranos, nor shall he cease
 until he satisfies his heart
 or someone takes the rule from him—that hard to capture rule.⁵

Yet Aeschylus, in many ways a traditionalist, writing plays still performed as part of a religious festival, did not question that Zeus, the king of the gods, deserves worship, for he yet retains “that hard to capture rule.” “Might and violence,” Hephaestus says in the play, “in you the command of Zeus has its perfect fulfillment,”⁶ and might and violence—power—in sufficient measure sufficed to define divinity.

Plato had warned against the teachings of the poets and playwrights, against those myths of Zeus’ sexuality and vengeance. We must teach our children, he wrote in the *Republic*, that the gods are without passion and wholly good.⁷ His student Aristotle picked up and developed that theme of divine impassibility. A god without passion, he concluded, must be indifferent to, indeed unaware of, the joys and sorrows of our changing world, lost in an eternal and unchanging thinking about thought.⁸ Divine impassibility thus initially served two functions. It ruled out vulgar passions: no more rapes, no more private vengeance. At the same time, it preserved divine power. Part of what it means to have power, after all, is that one can affect others for good or ill but remain unthreatened by them, invulnerable. It is the most powerful ruler who is safe and secure from external threat. Impassibility guarantees omnipotence.

The God of Israel never had pursued purely private passions, and spoke to Hosea of a tortured, never-ending love affair with the people Israel, and to Amos of seeking justice and righteousness rather than burnt offerings and solemn assemblies. Yet Yahweh, so Israel remembered it, had hardened Pharaoh’s heart and punished Saul for failing to slay the Amalekites. Such a deity seems a God of power and might, and even brutality. Philo tried to

⁵ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, lines 160-167, trans. David Grene, in *Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 71.

⁶ Ibid., line 12, p. 65.

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, book 2, 379b.

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b.

do for Yahweh what Plato had done for Zeus—explain away the stories that caused ethical scandal to a philosopher. But his doctrines likely had little appeal to ordinary folk in occupied Palestine, where the memory that Yahweh had destroyed Babylon led more than the Zealots to hope that a similar fate might await imperial Rome. Christians should not, as far too often we have, indulge in wrongheaded contrasts between the vindictive God of Judaism and the loving God of Christian faith. Such an interpretation badly distorts both sides, and I do not want to offer it even a hint of support. My point is simply that in that first-century world, when it came to questions about the power and passion of God, Judaism could offer at best mixed signals—just as the Christian church has offered at best mixed signals throughout its history.

In these matters, early on, Christian theology often sought alliances with the philosophers. At least as early as Justin Martyr, theologians were distinguishing the disgraceful, mad passions of pagan deities from the “impassible” God of Christian faith,⁹ and much of the Christian tradition has portrayed God as unaffected and unaffectedable. Jaroslav Pelikan even maintains that “the impassibility of God was a basic presupposition of all Christological doctrine.”¹⁰ Mystics and theologians issued minority reports from time to time; one cannot generalize too quickly about “the Christian tradition.” Even Aquinas, though he notoriously insisted that the nature of God’s relations to the world is such that things in the world are affected by God, but “in God there are no real relations to creatures,”¹¹ proves to be in this, as in most things, a complicated story. But the language of impassibility came to dominate. Protestant Scholasticism picked up much of it. The Westminster Confession explicitly affirms that God is “without body, parts, or passions, immutable.”¹²

Such images of God comport well with many of our cultural values. We admire success and strength and being number one. “To possess power,” as Carter Heyward puts it, “is to be on top—of someone else. . . . It is to be above the common folk—to flex the muscles of our brains, bodies, or ideologies—and to win.”¹³ A deity who most instantiates what we most admire, one could argue, would precisely be a powerful, invulnerable God. As Eber-

⁹ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 25.

¹⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 270.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a, q. 13, a. 7.

¹² “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” chap. 2, in *Book of Confessions*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 6.011.

¹³ Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), p. 117.

hard Jüngel has written, "This is the earthly way of thinking of a lord: first he has all power and then perhaps he can be merciful—but then again, perhaps not."¹⁴ This is the sort of God appealed to at political conventions to bless America, victor in the cold war. For theologians who begin with such a picture of God, christology can only take the form of a series of radical paradoxes, for a God so described has little in common with the crucified Jesus.

II

Given the long history I have sketched so hastily, it is a fairly remarkable phenomenon that so many theologians of our own century have so emphasized the vulnerability of God. Ronald Goetz can even speak with some accuracy of the emergence of a "new orthodoxy" of a suffering God.¹⁵ The theme appears prominently in German theologians from Barth and Bonhoeffer to Moltmann and Jüngel, in process theologians from Whitehead on, in some of the most creative Asian theology, and in liberation thought from Latin America to feminists in the United States. It could be interesting to speculate on the reasons for this trend—the ways, perhaps, in which a century that has seen the optimism of previous generations so shattered by tragedy finds it harder to accept a God distanced from the sufferings of the world.¹⁶

My purpose, however, is not to explore the cultural factors that might be at work in this theological development but to argue that in writing of a God who is vulnerable in love, Christian theologians are only reclaiming our own birthright, for it is just such a God that we encounter in the biblical narratives.

The Bible contains law codes, poems, prophecies, wise and not-so-wise sayings, and much else besides, as well as stories. The stories themselves are varied, and sometimes even mutually inconsistent; one cannot simply talk about "the biblical narrative." Still, stories, some of them interconnected, are

¹⁴ Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), p. 21.

¹⁵ Ronald Goetz, "The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy," *Christian Century* 103 (April 16, 1986): 385-389.

¹⁶ One thinks of Elie Wiesel's haunting story of the young Jewish boy killed in a Nazi concentration camp, as the other prisoners are forced to watch:

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

"Where is God now?"

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

"Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows." Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 76.

surely an important part of Scripture, and one of their functions is to narrate God's identity.¹⁷ That is, in a world, whether in the first century or the twentieth, with competing assumptions about the divine nature, one can take the Bible and say, "You want to know who God is, what God is like—well, here are some stories."

Some of the stories seem pretty brutal, and at odds with the picture of God we get from others, and we have to wrestle hard with whether we can somehow fit these pieces together. How can this seemingly brutal God be the God of love we encounter in different parts of what seems the same story? Many of the stories may not be historically accurate. The Gospels, as Calvin himself said, were not written "in such a manner, as to preserve, on all occasions, the exact order of time."¹⁸ "We know that the Evangelists were not very exact as to the order of dates, or even in detailing minutely everything that Christ said or did."¹⁹ Nevertheless, by attending to biblical stories, we get a picture of the God in whom the Bible calls us to have faith. For one thing, the stories function as anecdotes that reveal a person's character²⁰—in ways that we seem to lose, as is often the case with a good anecdote, if we try to summarize the point of the stories in non-narrative fashion. The Gospel stories may do this most clearly, for they show by anecdotal examples the sort of person Jesus was, and in Jesus God was revealing God's own self in human form.

Individual stories can thus render personal identity, but the shape of a whole narrative can do so as well. The way a story presents a character—the first scene in which we meet this person, the way different themes gradually emerge, the dramatic turning point of the story, the feelings with which we are left as the story ends—often provide keys to the identity a character has in the story. Newly popular hermeneutical methods such as rhetorical analysis, reader-response theories, and political and literary ap-

¹⁷ Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 87. "When one regards the biblical canon as a whole, the centrality to it of a narrative element is difficult to overlook: not only the chronological sweep of the whole, from creation to new creation . . . but also the way the large narrative portions interweave and provide a context for the remaining materials so that they, too, have a place in the ongoing story, while these other materials—parables, hymns, prayers, summaries, theological expositions—serve in different ways to enable readers to get hold of the story and to live their way into it" (Charles M. Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981], p. 100).

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 216.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 89.

²⁰ David Kelsey uses this term to describe what Karl Barth does in the "Royal Man" section of the *Church Dogmatics*. See David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 43.

proaches to the Bible, it turns out, can often help in understanding such matters, though admittedly some of the insights they generate turn out to look like a careful reader's common sense.

Consider, for instance, the book of Revelation, hardly anyone's idea of a "realistic narrative." Yet even here there is certainly a kind of story line: On the island of Patmos, the narrator has a vision, first of "one like the Son of Man" (1:13), who dictates messages to the seven churches of Asia. Then the narrator passes through a door to see a vision of the heavenly throne (4:1-2).

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep bitterly (5:1-4a).

The opening of the seven seals generates the rest of the story, so the crisis of whether anyone can be found to open the scroll constitutes the turning point of the whole narrative. But it is resolved in a very odd fashion. As the narrator weeps, one of the elders reassures him, "See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals" (5:5). But then, in the very next verse, the narrator sees not a conquering Lion, but a Lamb who has been slaughtered, and it is the Lamb who opens the seals—and the rest of the story unfolds. The text offers no explanation, and at least one commentator chalks it all up to confusion, "a quick and somewhat incongruous shift from one type of animal imagery to another," which may confusedly conflate an earlier tradition "in which a lion is the helper of the Messiah, who is a lamb."²¹

But is this shift of image a confusion or the very point of the story? The imagery earlier in the book consistently presents the language of power. The Son of Man in chapter one has feet like burnished bronze, carries a two-edged sword, "and his face was like the sun shining with full force" (1:16). The messages to the seven churches speak the language of power and even of threat. And the vision of the throne of God in chapter four parades every imperial attribute discoverable by the author's quite considerable imagination. What could be more natural than to expect the arrival of that conquering royal beast, the Lion?

²¹ Martin Rist, "Revelation: Introduction and Exegesis," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 407.

Instead, we get a slaughtered Lamb. Commenting on the passage, G. B. Caird writes that it is "as if John were saying to us . . . 'Wherever the Old Testament says *Lion*, read *Lamb*'. Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the Gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross."²² Caird grasps the basic contrast but puts it in a context all too common in the Christian tradition, setting the threatening God of the Hebrew Scriptures off against the gentle deity of the New Testament. Stating the issue in those terms oversimplifies both parts of the Christian Bible and misses the more general point of this text. The lesson of this narrative turning point is a more fundamental and general one: to contrast the ideologies of power, *wherever* they are found—in Babylon, Israel, Rome, Beijing, Washington, or Christian community—with the challenge of the gospel of the crucified One, the crucified One who came to reveal the God already known as the Lord who suffered with Israel.

From this moment on, at any rate, the Lamb never long leaves the story. The narrative returns to imagery of power, even of warfare, but the victories are victories of the Lamb who has been slaughtered. As Jacques Ellul puts it, for the book of Revelation,

The one who . . . unravels the secret of history, who holds it, and allows it to unfold as history is clearly not the All-Powerful Lord: he is the immolated Lamb. In the same way the one who presides at the "Last Judgment," at the separation of good and evil, at the condemnation, at the ultimate combat, is not the powerful athlete, muscular and majestic, of the admirable Sistine, . . . it is not the "chief of the heavenly militia"; it is not the Lord of Lords; it is the Lamb, the crucified, the stripped, the annihilated, the weakest of all . . . the one who has neither beauty, nor honor, nor power.²³

As I have argued, in the cultures in which the New Testament was written, as in our own, few expected a messenger, much less a self-revelation, of God, to take such a form. In the Hellenistic world, it was powerful heroes and mighty emperors who were deified. Celsus, indeed, contrasted the "plainly evident" appearances of the pagan deities with the "stealthy and secretive manner" of "the fellow who deceived the Christians."²⁴ He knew

²² G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 75.

²³ Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse*, trans. George W. Schreiner (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 117.

²⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.35.

what a divine epiphany ought to look like, and Jesus hardly fit the requirements. Many among Jesus' Jewish contemporaries understandably hoped for a triumphant Messiah who would defeat the hated Romans, and they too could only find this crucified teacher a disappointment if they took him seriously at all.²⁵ The first century, like the twentieth, expected deity to triumph through power.

But suppose God is not like that. Suppose God, more than anything else, freely loves, and in that love is willing to be vulnerable and to risk suffering. Stories, I have proposed, provide a good way of presenting a person's identity, but the task of narrating the identity of a human being who is the self-revelation of such a God poses great problems. On the one hand, one has to make it clear that the story of this human person really is the story of God. After all, as Kierkegaard once remarked, "God did not assume the form of a servant to make a mockery of us; hence it cannot be his intention to pass through the world in such a manner that no single human being becomes aware of his presence."²⁶ On the other hand, one needs to challenge many of the assumptions about the nature of God that readers will bring to the story. So how do you present the story of a human life as the self-revelation of God without falling into the imagery of power and might that shaped thinking about God in Jesus' day and continues to shape it in ours? How do you tell a story that shows your readers the divinity of this wandering rabbi while at the same time you are rejecting the assumptions your readers will have about the nature of divinity?

The difficulties such problems raise for narrative strategy may be suggested by the fact that Paul did not attempt to solve them. The story he told was primarily one of the eternal Christ self-emptying into human likeness. In Paul's gospel, Jesus of Nazareth is born, shares the bread and cup on the night when he was betrayed, and suffers and dies on a cross. No other stories of Jesus' earthly life, no references, ever, to a single miracle he performed. Nothing that would manifest this human life as the self-revelation of God by trading on the imagery of divine power—very little at all, in fact, about this human life. It has become customary to note that, after all, Paul had not

²⁵ The evidence concerning violence and military imagery in messianic expectations is mixed. The Psalms of Solomon and 4 Ezra, for instance, say that the Messiah will not use military weapons; 2 Baruch says he will carry a sword. James H. Charlesworth, "From Messianology to Christology," in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs*, ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest Frerichs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 248. Green's introduction to this helpful volume (pp. 2-3) surveys some of the complexities of first-century references to Messiahs.

²⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 69 (translation altered).

known Jesus' life at first hand, and yet I wonder. On one occasion he seems to have spent fifteen days with Peter, and he had other contacts with the Jerusalem community. Would he not have known stories about Jesus' life, stories unknown to his readers, stories that might have illustrated points of concern to him with a particular authority?

III

It is dangerous to infer from silence, but at least thinking about what Paul left unsaid provides an entry point for thinking about what the Gospel of Mark does say. Through narratives, it presents an extended account of Jesus' identity as God's self-revelation; so far as we know, this was the first time anyone had ever tried to do that. For all the common condescending remarks about the quality of Mark's Greek and the awkwardness of his prose, considered as a solution to these narrative problems, the text stands as a work of genius.

Theodore Weeden's study of Mark has helped generate some of the most interesting discussions among scholars of the earliest Gospel in the twenty years since Weeden published his book. He argued that the author wrote with the quite specific purpose of refuting a party within his own community that had developed a divine-man christology and ecclesiology. Jesus was, for them, the powerful wonderworker who manifested God, and they, like the Corinthian group Paul attacked in 2 Corinthians, saw themselves as simply continuing the power of Jesus in their own lives, through pneumatic gifts, ecstatic experiences, and miraculous feats.²⁷ In Weeden's interpretation, Mark wrote, on the other hand, for a community of Palestinian Christians who, "separated from their Lord . . . found themselves in a cruel period of suffering and misery while evil forces still abounded in the world," and who followed a suffering, humble Christ.²⁸ Therefore, the disciples, who represent the ideology of power, become the villains of the story, with Jesus as the humble, suffering hero.

Weeden's historical conclusions continue to be controversial. A majority of scholars, I think, rejects his location of the writing of the Gospel in Palestine. While agreeing with Weeden on the centrality of Mark's polemic against the disciples, Werner Kelber has argued that the real issue was historical rather than christological. After the destruction of the Jerusalem church in the Jewish War of 66-70, Christians needed an explanation of this

²⁷ Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 60-61.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

tragedy, and the author of Mark provided an anti-Jerusalem, anti-twelve-disciples polemic to explain the fall of the Jerusalem church as divine punishment.²⁹ For Weeden, Mark is attacking a christology that identifies Jesus as a divine man, a *theios aner*, one of those Hellenistic wonderworkers who constituted a sort of human epiphany of God; but Dieter Georgi argues that Mark still presents a divine-man christology, and Jack Dean Kingsbury maintains that *theios aner* was actually such a rare and variously used term in classical culture that it does not provide a useful category for thinking about the background of Mark, one way or the other.³⁰

Whatever the accuracy of his particular historical claims, Weeden's thesis can offer what Norman Perrin said it had provided for his work—a "catalytic agent" for thinking about Mark's christology.³¹ His contrast between ideologies of power and of suffering in Mark provides a valuable way of thinking about this gospel's rhetorical emphases: the consistent undercutting of the language of power and the authority of those who claim it.

The Gospel's title, in most manuscripts, declares that the story before us is "the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God," but the narrator's own voice never refers to Jesus as the Son of God again. Good news, *euangelion* in Greek, would often have been the term used for the news of victory in battle or an amnesty on the accession of a new sovereign, but in this story no sooner does the Spirit descend upon Jesus and a voice from heaven proclaim him, "My Son, the Beloved," than "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (1:11-12). This will not be a story, we as readers gather, of easy triumphs or the usual sort of monarch.

To be sure, this Jesus heals and performs other miracles, but he silences those he has healed, almost as if the act were one of shame (1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). In the act of healing, moreover, he touches lepers (1:41) and spits on the tongue of a deaf man (7:33); the very forms of his healing would have been, to his contemporaries, both ritually polluting and physically disgusting.³² When the leader of the synagogue asks for his help in curing his daughter, Jesus makes Jairus wait while he tends to a woman who has been suffering from menstrual hemorrhaging. For the business of wonderwork-

²⁹ Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 88-95.

³⁰ Dieter Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2 Korintherbrief* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964); Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The 'Divine Man' as the Key to Mark's Christology—The End of an Era?" *Interpretation* 35 (July 1981): 248. See also Morton Smith, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretologies, Divine Men, the Gospels and Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (June 1971): 174-199.

³¹ Norman Perrin, *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 110.

³² Ched Meyers, *Binding the Strong Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), pp. 153, 205.

ing, this gets every priority wrong: he postpones raising a child from the dead for a comparatively trivial cure whose results both their physical character and the cultural taboos of the time would have kept invisible; he turns from the socially important male to heal a nameless woman; he responds to the woman's polluting touch with praise of her faith.³³ Then he turns to the really dramatic miracle and nearly renders it a farce, insisting, in the face of all the evidence, that the child is not dead but merely sleeping, so that on-lookers burst into laughter (5:40).

What sort of miracle worker is this? The professional wonderworkers of that age, or of ours, know how to milk the dramatic moment. Jesus seems to keep undercutting the wonders; Mark, indeed, never uses the usual Greek word for "miracle" in describing these events. Little surprise, perhaps, that such acts seem to do Jesus more harm than good: after healing the leper, he can no longer go into a town openly (1:45); the Gerasenes' reaction to his cure of the demoniac is to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood (5:17); immediately after the dramatic resuscitation of Jairus' daughter comes the fiasco at Nazareth. Jesus walks on the water of the sea, but the narrator's immediate comment is that the disciples did not understand his miracles, for their hearts were hardened (6:51).

This Jesus calls disciples, but the narrative "paints them as obtuse, obdurate, recalcitrant men who at first are unperceptive of Jesus' messiahship, then oppose its style and character, and finally totally reject it."³⁴ The story ends without their rehabilitation. Yet the blame seems not to rest entirely with them.³⁵ Jesus speaks to the multitudes in deliberately mysterious parables, yet even the disciples to whom he offers explanations of a sort consistently fail to understand, and on one level the explanations of the supposedly opaque parables seem obvious enough that we wonder if we are missing the real point too. As Frank Kermode says, it feels like a narrative designed to turn every insider into an outsider.³⁶ This Jesus is as oddly paradoxical a teacher as he is a wonderworker.

Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? At a kind of climax in the story, Jesus appears dazzlingly to Peter, James, and John, with Moses and Elijah beside

³³ Ibid., pp. 200-202.

³⁴ Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict*, pp. 50-51.

³⁵ Here I would disagree with Weeden, who insists that "Mark is assiduously involved in a vendetta against the disciples" (Ibid.).

³⁶ "Being an insider is only a more elaborate way of being kept outside" (Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979], p. 27). "A 'gospel' is a narrative of a son of god who appears among men as a riddle inviting misunderstanding" (Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978], p. 204).

him. The obvious thing to say would be, "Look!" but the voice from heaven—in literary terms a kind of privileged voice from outside the narrative world that speaks only here and at Jesus' baptism—says, not "Look," but "Listen to him," though Jesus, in the scene at hand, does not speak (9:7). When he does next speak, however, he tells of the suffering the Son of Man must undergo—so that the point of the voice from heaven is to attend not to the dazzling epiphany but to the teaching about suffering. No sooner does Peter proclaim Jesus' identity as the Messiah than he starts to contradict him,³⁷ and Jesus shifts from an already ominous command to silence to a stern rebuke. Peter expects a Messiah, and thinks he knows what that means, but he has it all wrong, just as anyone with the usual expectations about wandering miracle workers would have it all wrong. And we readers, with our expectations set by the opening identification of this text as the gospel of the Son of God, our expectations are also being subverted at every step.

Mark uses every strategy to say two things at once: yes, this is the Messiah, the greatest of miracle workers, the Son of God, but, no, that does not mean at all what you thought it meant. Irony is the rhetorical device best suited for saying, "Yes, but no," and the ironies grow as the story progresses.³⁸ Jesus enters Jerusalem on a little colt: it is at once a humble and slightly silly ride and the fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy. He is anointed as were the kings of old, as the Messiah ought to be, but by an unnamed woman, and in a context where the act only generates controversy and presages his death. Through most of the Gospel, Mark has presented wonders in ways that undercut our expectations. Now the irony reverses, and he presents tragedy in a way that hints at wonder. Jesus sorrowfully ascends the Mount of Olives, accompanied by three followers who protest their loyalty, only to be betrayed by a trusted associate. It is a story of defeat but it exactly parallels the story of David at the time of Absalom's rebellion—David the greatest king, the source of so much Messianic imagery.³⁹

³⁷ "Peter's next actions in relation to Jesus are shocking in the extreme. When Jesus starts to teach the disciples about the inevitability of suffering, rejection and death that he faces, Peter rebukes him (8:31-32). . . . What degree of pride or arrogance must exist to allow one to refute the Messiah?" (Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989], p. 201).

³⁸ See Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 28-29. For an approach that deals with different issues, but in a way complementary to mine, see Jerry Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark's Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³⁹ John R. Donahue, "Temple, Trial, and Royal Christology," in *The Passion in Mark*, ed. Werner Kelber (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 76.

Peter, the rock, betrays him, just as Jesus had prophesied. The cock crow brings that realization home to Peter just as the bullying soldiers are calling on Jesus to prophesy. He remains silent, but we readers know his prophecy has just been fulfilled.⁴⁰ He receives a purple cloak and a crown; the soldiers bow down before him, and it is all intended as humiliating mockery. We, recognizing the irony, see that he really is a king, but his coronation takes the form of a scourging. Only in the midst of his trial does he proclaim himself the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One. Only as he dies on the cross does a human voice at last recognize him as the Son of God.⁴¹

The cross, moreover, does not just represent a painful way to die. It is the humiliating penalty assigned the lowest of criminals, the fate of the rankest of outsiders, full of shame and perhaps—though here the historical evidence seems ambiguous, and Mark does not make the point—subject to curse in Jewish tradition. One might think of those who have AIDS as the equivalents in our society to one who suffers crucifixion, victims not only of great pain but also of degradation and humiliation from the dominant values of the culture. A few chapters earlier, when Jesus talked most vividly of times of crisis ahead, he had said it would be imposters claiming to be messiahs who would work signs and wonders, while disciples would suffer floggings and arrest, betrayal and hatred. In that context, as bystanders call on him to work a miracle and come down from the cross, it is his silent suffering that paradoxically confirms his identity as the true Messiah.⁴²

And then, some women find Jesus' tomb empty, and a young man appears with an enigmatic message that serves only to terrify them, and at that point, notoriously, the Gospel ends, with an abruptness that extends even to the grammar of the last sentence. Jesus proclaimed himself the Messiah in the midst of a criminal trial, and a military officer recognized him as the Son of God as he died on a cross. We do not see a triumphant divine Jesus,

⁴⁰ Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 159.

⁴¹ Calvin, I fear, got this one wrong. "When Mark says that the centurion spoke thus, because Christ, when he had uttered a loud voice, expired, some commentators think that he intends to point out the unwonted strength which remained unimpaired till death; and certainly, as the body of Christ was almost exhausted of blood, it could not happen, in the ordinary course of things, that the sides and the lungs should retain sufficient vigor for uttering so loud a cry. Yet I rather think that the centurion intended to applaud the unshaken perseverance of Christ in calling on the name of God. Nor was it merely the cry of Christ that led the centurion to think so highly of him, but this confession was extorted from him by perceiving that his extraordinary strength harmonized with heavenly miracles" (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 3 [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989], p. 327). The whole point is precisely that this is *not* a moment of miraculous or extraordinary strength.

⁴² Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, p. 261.

pulling away the mask of suffering like a magician at the end of a trick. Mark's Gospel invites us to see Jesus' divinity precisely as he dies on the cross, for, after that, we never see him at all.⁴³

IV

For christology, my teacher Hans Frei used to say, it is not that the doctrine is the meaning of the story but rather that the story is the meaning of the doctrine.⁴⁴ In other words, our hermeneutical goal should not be to find a series of doctrinal propositions that constitute the "real meaning" of the stories, such that we could then discard the stories themselves. Rather, conceptual formulations serve as heuristic aids that serve us best when they thrust us back to the stories themselves with new understanding.⁴⁵ So in this case, to understand the story is to recognize, when it has reached its enigmatic ending, that it has been a story about God, and that it is oddly a story of triumph. Christological doctrine should not replace the narrative but rather help us understand it in just this way.

"For responsible Christian usage of the word 'God,'" Eberhard Jüngel has written, "the Crucified One is virtually the real definition of what is meant with the word 'God.'" ⁴⁶ If we take the Gospel of Mark as one trajectory toward understanding the God whose self-revealed identity it narrates, then we encounter a God who, in Karl Barth's phrase, is the one who loves in freedom.⁴⁷ Love means a willingness to take risks, to give to the other at real cost to oneself, to chance rejection. In Barth's words, God "does not forfeit anything by doing this. . . . On the contrary," precisely in showing willingness and readiness "for this condescension, this act of extravagance, this far journey," God is marked out from all the false Gods. "They are not capable and ready for this. In their otherworldliness and supernaturalness and otherness," the deities of human manufacture are a reflection of the human pride that will not unbend, that will not stoop to that which is beneath it.⁴⁸ Such is not the God we come to know in Jesus. To quote a very

⁴³ See Neill Q. Hamilton, *Jesus for a No-God World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 62-63; Donald Michie and David Rhoads, *Mark as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 61-62; John Dominic Crossan, "Empty Tomb and Absent Lord," in *The Passion in Mark*, ed. Kelber, p. 152.

⁴⁴ Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 126.

⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur makes an analogous point about understanding myths. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 348-352.

⁴⁶ Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, pt. 2, trans. G. W. Bromiley et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), pp. 257-321.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

different theologian, Carter Heyward, "Jesus did not come to reveal God's power, God's might, God's victory. Rather, Jesus came . . . into the pain, the passion, and the wonder of creation itself. Jesus accepted the vocation of being truly human in the image of an enigmatic God."⁴⁹ "The power of the God depicted by Scripture," as Daniel Migliore says, "is strange power. It is not the power of force but the power of Spirit . . . and it is made known above all in the weakness of the cross of Jesus."⁵⁰

Yet this vulnerable God is the one, the ringing opening of the Scots Confession declares, "whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust."⁵¹ Is such a God strong enough to trust? Is such a God worthy of worship?

We can trust in God because of God's unfailing love. God is trustworthy not in an impassibility unaffected by anything in the world, but in a love that will not surrender, no matter what the cost God must bear in suffering out of faithfulness in love. In that sense, as Athanasius said, "God is always, and one and the same. . . . When then people in infirmity invoke God, when in persecution they ask help, when under injuries they pray, then the Invisible, being a lover of humankind, shines forth upon them."⁵² God is trustworthy not because nothing is a burden to God but because God will bear whatever burden love requires. And so God is, "always . . . one and the same." Jesus Christ reveals who God is, and always has been, and always will be.

Nothing forces God to act in love. God freely chooses to create a universe. God freely sustains that universe even when evil in it turns against its creator. God freely redeems that universe, even at great cost of divine suffering. To speak of this freedom is simply to say that, if we ask why God acts in this way, the only answer lies in God's own nature. Rulers abandon rebels, or destroy, and the more powerful the ruler the more forceful the blow. To be a perfect lover, on the other hand, would be never to give up on one's beloved. The faithfulness of love endures, out of no necessity but the necessity of the freedom of love itself.

We worship God, then, not intimidated by sheer divine power, but because, in the face of a love that reaches literally beyond our human imagining, we are "lost in wonder, love and praise." Sheer power, Barth says, "is

⁴⁹ Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), p. 52.

⁵¹ *Book of Confessions*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 3.01.

⁵² Athanasius, *Discourses against the Arians* 1.13.63.

not merely neutral. Power in itself is evil. It is nothing less than freedom from restraint and suppression."⁵³ Sheer power is not the adult's thoughtful command of the situation but the infant's worst willfulness grown beyond restraint, mad Caligula made emperor of Rome. "It is blasphemy to ascribe this kind of power to God."⁵⁴ God's strength lies rather in the power of love, the persuasive power that lures us to want to live in its image, the willingness to risk suffering in love. In the face of such strength, extended without limits, worship and trust are precisely the appropriate response. The God we know in Jesus Christ is not the merely nice God modern liberalism has too often offered as an alternative to images of divine power, but a God all the more holy and wondrous for being gracious.

If this God seems at first weak, perhaps that is because we have bought so many of our culture's assumptions—maybe our sinful human assumptions—about what constitutes strength and success. If we worship power and wealth, then a God who, in the freedom of love, accepts suffering and humiliation may well seem weak to us. Suffering love, however, has its own kind of strength—think of St. Francis; think of Gandhi.

To cite such examples, indeed to speak of God's "strength," is to call attention to an ambiguity embedded in the rhetorical strategy I have been using. What I want to say is: our culture has a set of assumptions about power, and God is not like that. I could have made the argument by saying that our culture's definitions of power are misguided: here is what power really ought to mean, as instantiated most of all in a God whose power is in the strength of vulnerable love. Instead, I have conceded the cultural definition of power and argued that, if that is what power means, then God is not powerful.

The two roads reach the same destination; each has its advantages and disadvantages. My strategy leaves me without consistent language for talking about the strange ways in which God is powerful. I am assuming that the usual definitions of power so pervade our thinking that the alternative strategy of redefining power poses even greater problems. However clearly we think of power as defined in a new way by divine vulnerability, our patterns of thought virtually guarantee that within five minutes the word

⁵³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 524.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 525. I am therefore not persuaded by the case made against Barth that, "although Barth does make efforts in the direction of modifying the *scope* of divine power, he leaves the *meaning* for power underlying the term 'omnipotence' unaltered," in Anna Case-Winter's thoughtful book, *God's Power* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), p. 97.

“power” will once again evoke the old military patriarchal imagery. Better, for the making of this point anyway, to give up the word.

I am conscious, moreover, of speaking out of a privileged position to a mostly privileged audience. Those the world deems powerless may need to hear the news of a kind of empowerment. The powerful need above all the shaking of their images of power.

The strange power of God is the power to risk suffering. It would be a weak, poor God, Moltmann says, who could not love or suffer.⁵⁵ Such a God would be trapped in a prison of impassibility. In my title I have referred, however, not to God’s suffering but to God’s vulnerability. I want to resist the claim that suffering itself is a good, an idea the language of Moltmann and others sometimes suggests. The freedom of love is good, and that freedom risks suffering, and, in a sinful world full of violence and injustice, will always encounter it sooner or later. Love does not regret the price it pays for making itself vulnerable, but to speak of paying a price is in itself to acknowledge that the suffering itself is an evil. In the eternal reign of God, love will respond to love, in ever greater joy. Vulnerability, on the other hand, is a perfection of loving freedom.

In these remarks, I have simply wanted to invite some thinking about the story Mark tells us, and what that story might help us understand about God. It is tempting to say dismissively that of course the story comes from the first century, and we are all twentieth-century folk, but I think that contrast misses the point. The idea that vulnerable love and not power provides the key to what is and what ought to be was as foreign to that century as to this one. What really challenges us about Mark, I suspect, is what has always been its challenge: that the story of this crucified Jew might really be the good news of the Son of God.

In his lament for his son Eric, killed at twenty-five in a mountaineering accident, Nicholas Wolterstorff remarks that it was only in the midst of his own suffering that he saw that God suffers. He reflects on the old belief that no one can behold God’s face and live. I always thought, Wolterstorff says, that this meant that no one could see God’s splendor and live. A friend said perhaps it means that no one could see God’s sorrow and live. Or perhaps, he reflects, the sorrow is the splendor.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 253.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), p. 81.

God's People: A Community without Walls

by ALAN NEELY

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REFORM AND RETRENCHMENT

TIME WAS running out for remnants of the Jewish community in the fifth century B.C.E. Small numbers of them had straggled back from Babylonian exile to their homeland in Judah, but what they found was devastating. Jerusalem lay in ruins. Their once proud kingdom was now nothing more than a feudal colony, a tenant within the Persian Empire. As a political entity Judah was never weaker nor more vulnerable. Lacking king and army, subject to the whims of a foreign power, dependent on religious leaders who, according to the prophet Malachi, despised God's name (1:6) and profaned God's altar (1:12), the people were threatened and manipulated from without and dispirited within. As a nation, they appeared finished. Looking around they saw little more than razed and scattered stones bearing witness to the former magnificence of Solomon's Temple. The massive wall that once surrounded Jerusalem was likewise pulled down. If they were to develop any sense of nationhood, recover any measure of their past glory, or even survive as a people, radical, stringent measures were required, measures that would have to begin with a thoroughgoing civil and religious reform. Everything had to be rebuilt, and religious and social life had to be vigorously regulated.

The history and extent of this reform movement are described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Reconstruction began with the immense project of rebuilding the wall and subsequently the Temple. As the wall began to go up, indications increased and rumors abounded that enemies would attack at any moment. Thus, the workers had to be prepared to fight while trying to carry on their work. Evidently the tension was released, according to the writer of Nehemiah, by their singing a kind of ditty:

We grow weary bearing all these burdens;

There's so much debris to haul away.

How can the governor or anybody else

expect us to work on the wall today? (4:10 [TEV]).

The reform, nonetheless, demanded the rebuilding of the wall first, and it was soon accompanied by a series of new laws regulating the economy. A program of land reform was instituted, for example, and a strict prohibition was issued against charging interest on loans made to members of the community (5:7-13). Nehemiah himself set an example of personal sacrifice by refusing all compensation due him as governor, as well as by feeding large numbers of workers and their families from his own table. In contrast to rulers of the past, Nehemiah acquired no property during this time (5:14-18).

Once the wall was reconstructed and rebuilding the Temple was well underway, the reform continued. Additional directives were announced regarding worship, the responsibilities of the priests, and how the Sabbath and other holy days were to be observed. Then came the final, unexpected, and most exacting demand. The people of Judah were ordered by Ezra and Nehemiah to separate themselves "from all foreign peoples" and to send away their "foreign wives" (Ezra 10:11; Neh. 10:29-30; 13:23-29). It was an extreme demand occasioned by fear and mistrust. The book of Nehemiah, nevertheless, ends with the governor's making an indelicate if not egregious boast:

I purified the people from everything foreign; I prepared regulations for the priests and the Levites so that each one would know his duty; I arranged for the wood used for burning the offerings to be brought at the proper times, and for the people to bring their offerings of the first grain and the first fruits that ripened. Remember all this, O God, and give me credit for it (13:30-31 [TEV]).

Why did they go to such extremes? The answer is found in human nature. When the future is uncertain, when people are disoriented, when the symbols of unity and stability have disappeared, and when the survival of the community is perceived to be at risk, the natural propensity is to circle the wagons, build fences, and erect walls. This is as much a part of our religious as it is of our political history. In times like these, the appeal of isolation and exclusiveness is strong. Paul D. Hanson, writing about the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, says:

The Jewish community of the fifth century faced threats to its existence similar in important respects to threats faced by Israel in her early years of kingship: the menace of hostile neighbors, the inability of the people

to muster sufficient strength to defend themselves, and centrifugal tendencies that were threatening to tear the society apart. In the eleventh century, the answer had been found in the centralization of authority in the king. In the fifth century, it was found in the centralization of leadership in two figures authorized by the Persians, Ezra the Scribe and Nehemiah the Governor. In both cases the imputation of order on an unstable situation brought with it a rigidifying of social norms that tended to close the community to the dynamic outreach characteristic of more expansive periods.¹

Hanson's final sentence is momentous. The measures taken to protect the community during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah "tended to close the community to the dynamic outreach" clearly implied in the Abrahamic covenant: "And through you I will bless all the nations" (Gen. 12:3).

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH: AN EXAMPLE OF ETHNIC CLEANSING?

The culmination of the reform under Ezra and Nehemiah is described in the final verses of the book of Nehemiah:

When the Law of Moses was being read aloud to the people, they came to the passage [Deut. 23:1-6]² that said that no Ammonite or Moabite was ever to be permitted to join God's people. This was because the people of Ammon and Moab did not give food and water to the Israelites on their way out of Egypt. Instead they paid money to Balaam to curse Israel, but our God turned the curse to a blessing. When the people of Israel heard this law read, they excluded all foreigners from the community (13:1-3).

Not only was the Temple reconstructed and the walls around the city rebuilt to protect the people from their enemies, a program of ethnic cleansing was instituted, and a wall of ethnic separatism, of segregation and iso-

¹ *The People Called* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 297.

² Deuteronomy 23:1-6 (TEV) reads as follows:

No man who has been castrated or whose penis has been cut off may be included among the Lord's people.

No one born out of wedlock or any descendant of such a person, even in the tenth generation, may be included among the Lord's people.

No Ammonite or Moabite—or any of their descendants, even in the tenth generation—may be included among the Lord's people. [Because] they refused to provide you with food and water when you were on your way out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor, from the city of Pethor in Mesopotamia, to curse you. But the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam; instead he turned the curse into a blessing, because he loved you. As long as you are a nation, never do anything to help these nations or to make them prosperous.

lation was erected whereby national and religious identity were determined exclusively by the principle of heredity.³ This kind of sweeping, indiscriminate purging of a society, however, inevitably hurts innocent people, and one can only imagine the pain and the suffering inflicted upon women who had to abandon their own children. Some of these women doubtless considered themselves worshipers of Yahweh, who because of being "foreigners" were driven from the community.

Any reform movement that places the survival of a community or its institutions—be they family, church, or nation—above the welfare of the weakest and most defenseless member in that community is suspect. Is this not the implicit meaning of Jesus' parabolic act of healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:9-14; Mk. 3:1-6; Lk. 6:6-11)? Is not Jesus indicating that how a community treats its weakest, most vulnerable members should be the norm by which the collective ethic is judged? And is not Jesus saying by this act that the welfare of individuals, especially the helpless, is more important than arbitrary rules designed to protect the strong?

Admittedly, assimilation and loss of identity are a threat to any community, and this is a part of biblical tradition. But excluding people from the community on the basis of characteristics they cannot change contradicts another biblical tradition, a tradition not only integral to the Old Testament, but a tradition that is a part of the very core of the gospel. Several conspicuous examples of "mixed marriages" are found in the Old Testament. Judah, for example, married a Canaanite (Gen. 38:2-3); Joseph took a foreign wife, the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Gen. 41:45); and Moses married a Cushite woman (Num. 12:1); and none of these unions was condemned directly or otherwise. In fact, in Moses' case, God rebuked Miriam and Aaron simply for raising the issue (Num. 12:1-15).

Why were these marriages not denounced? Perhaps it was the low level of community consciousness. Maybe these alliances were not seen as threats, or the perpetrators were too important or powerful to accuse. Possibly they were condemned and the condemnation was suppressed or forgotten. There is, it would appear, a more important reason. If God's people were closed to outsiders, if the community was isolated from other peoples, how could it be a "light to the nations" (Isa. 49:6)?

How was this chosen people to be a source of blessing to the families of the earth and a servant nation in bringing Yahweh's Torah and

³ Hanson, *The People Called*, p. 298.

shalom to the nations if its chosenness was no longer construed in terms of agency on behalf of the nations but in terms of avoidance of all contact with "the peoples of the lands"?⁴

The realization of Israel's mission depended on their relations with outsiders. A striking expression of this conviction is found in the book of Ruth.

RUTH: A CHALLENGE TO SEPARATISM AND EXCLUSIVISM?

Only two books in the Old Testament bear the names of women: the book of Esther and the book of Ruth.⁵ Esther is a story of intrigue and a failed anti-Jewish pogrom. God is not mentioned in the book. Ruth is a cleverly written tale of love and fidelity.⁶ God's role is central in the story. Furthermore, there are no villains. While exquisite in composition, the purpose of Ruth and how it came to be included in the canon are difficult to ascertain. And the question of the date of the book remains hotly debated. If Ruth was composed before the exile, then it may have been written to set forth the principal characters as models of faithfulness to Yahweh, or, as some scholars have hypothesized, to establish the ancestry of King David. Still others have suggested that Ruth was written to sanction the law regarding levirate marriage.⁷ On the other hand, there are several indications that the text we have is post-exilic, that is, after 515 B.C.E. A discussion of these clues can be found in most good essays on Ruth.⁸ The book, for example, contains several Aramaic expressions as well as certain Hebrew words not in use until shortly before and during the intertestamental period. Also, as Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. notes, "the concluding genealogies (4:17, 18-22) presuppose that David was a figure well known to the ancient audience."⁹ Moreover, the text includes an explanation of the meaning of the

⁴ Hanson, *The People Called*, p. 299.

⁵ Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. offers a provocative argument for considering the possibility that Ruth was written by a woman in *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), p. 24.

⁶ Hermann Gunkel regarded the book as a novella according to Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 562.

⁷ See Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

⁸ See, e.g., R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948); R. Gordis, "Love, Marriage, and Business in the Book of Ruth," in *A Light unto My Path*, ed. H. N. Bream et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974); and Anthony Phillips, "The Book of Ruth: Deception and Shame," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 1-17.

⁹ *The Book of Ruth*, p. 23. Hubbard favors a pre-exilic dating of the book, but his argument is for me unconvincing (pp. 23-34). Two extensive discussions of the date question may be found in Gordis, "Love, Marriage, and Business in the Book of Ruth"; and Jean-Luc Vesco, "La date du livre de Ruth," *Revue Biblique* 74 (1967): 235-247.

removing and giving of the sandal to seal a business agreement (4:7), an indication that the custom had fallen into disuse by the time the book was written. Thus, one can argue that Ruth was likely written sometime between 450 and 250 B.C.E., and represents a direct challenge to religious and ethnic insularity promoted under Ezra and Nehemiah.

RETELLING THE STORY OF RUTH

The narrative of Ruth is brief and captivating. It begins: Once upon a time before Israel became a monarchy, there was a severe famine in the land, and a man named Elimelech ("My God is King")¹⁰ and his wife Naomi ("Joy") moved from their home in Bethlehem to Moab taking with them their two sons, Mahlon ("Obliterate") and Chilion ("Cease to Exist").¹¹

Sometime after they settled in Moab, Elimelech died, and Naomi was left a widow with her two sons who eventually took Moabite wives, Orpha ("Cloud") and Ruth ("Friend").¹² Unfortunately, the sons also died, and Naomi was left completely alone except for her two foreign daughters-in-law.

When she heard that conditions were much improved in her own land, she prepared to leave Moab and advised Orpha and Ruth to return to their own families. Then Naomi did something quite unusual. She invoked on these two young Moabite women the blessing of Yahweh: "May God be good to you [and] show you divine favor (*hesed*). May you marry again and may you have your own home and family" (1:8-9).¹³ Is Naomi's blessing not

¹⁰ The etymology of some if not all of the names in the book are, I believe, significant. See Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975). Though names in our English-speaking culture are chosen for a number of reasons, they are rarely chosen for their etymological meanings. In other cultures, however, names given to children—and this was no less true for Semitic peoples—were carefully selected for their meanings. Paul G. Hiebert, writing about the importance of names in certain cultures, says an individual's social identity is established in part by his or her name. "Obviously, names are more than labels, often providing information as to the sex and character of an individual." For this reason, among some peoples, a child is given a provisional name that is later changed to describe more accurately the individual's character. *Cultural Anthropology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 162.

¹¹ The roots of the sons' names are so rare that it is impossible to be certain of their meaning.

¹² The meanings I include here are those suggested by Louise Pettibone Smith in her "Exegesis of the Book of Ruth," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 834. Though one should not attach too much significance to these ancient names, which may have been changed or added by copyists, if the names have intended meanings, the writer may have been engaging in a kind of wordplay in which "Cloud," suggesting the vaporous or ephemeral, is contrasted with the faithful devotion and loyalty of "Friend."

¹³ Literally, the passage may be rendered: "And Naomi said to them, 'Go, return each of you to the house of your mother. May Yahweh perform *hesed* with you as you have done

a clear violation of the Deuteronomic injunction not to do anything to benefit Moabites (Deut. 23:6)?

The two women, however, expressed a strong reluctance to heed the counsel of their mother-in-law. Crying aloud they protested in the strongest terms. "No, no, we will go with you to your people" (1:10). But Naomi persisted, pointing out that such a decision on their part would be ill advised. It would be folly, she said (1:11-13). Orpha began to cry a second time, but finally kissed Naomi, said goodbye, and returned to her home. But Ruth, in contrast, refused to go and implored her mother-in-law, whom she now loved as if Naomi were her own mother, not to insist that she leave. The first scene ends with this Moabite daughter-in-law's plea and vow.

Don't ask me to leave you. Please let me go with you. I will go wherever you go, and I will live wherever you live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. And wherever you die, that is where I will die and be buried (1:16-17).¹⁴

The second scene of the book opens with the two women arriving in Bethlehem. The village women greeted Naomi, "Is this really 'Joy'? Have you finally come home?" to which Naomi replied, "Don't call me 'Joy.' Call me 'Bitterness,' for God has ruined my life. When I left here I had plenty, but I have come back without a thing" (1:19-20). Naomi's resentment is accentuated by the ignoring of her devoted daughter-in-law who apparently was considered unworthy of mention. The writer emphasizes this slight by adding: "This, then, was *how* Naomi came back from Moab with Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law" (1:22).

The third scene in the book takes place in the field of Naomi's kinsman, Boaz, meaning "Nimbleness" or "Strength." (It is worth noting that according to the genealogy of Jesus found in Matthew's Gospel [1:6], Boaz was the son of Rahab the prostitute.) Though Boaz evidently was much older than Ruth and was not Naomi's nearest-of-kin, he favored the young Moabite woman, and in the fourth scene agreed, not reluctantly it appears, to honor

with the dead and with me. May Yahweh grant that you find a resting place, each of you in the house of your husband."

¹⁴ It is difficult to translate this passage with the depth of feeling and far-reaching implications involved. Ruth pleads with Naomi, ending with a solemn oath: "Don't ask me to abandon you or to turn back from going with you. Wherever you go I will go, wherever you stay [should be translated to signify not a permanent residence but rather a temporary abode of someone looking for a place to stay night-by-night], I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God (*Elohim*) will be my God. Wherever you die, there I will die and be buried." Then Ruth uses for the first time another name for God: "Thus, may Yahweh do thus to me and even more, if even death separates me from you!" (1:16-17).

the law of next-of-kin marriage and take Ruth as his wife. The careful planning by Naomi, the would-be matchmaker, the growing interest in Ruth evidenced by Boaz, the scene on the threshing floor during which Ruth signals her readiness to become the older man's wife, are related with a kind of literary elegance and propriety uncharacteristic of many ancient tales.

The negotiations at the gate of the city are as revealing as they are entertaining. Naomi had already indicated to Ruth that Boaz would pursue the matter with haste, and so he did. Sitting down at the gate, the town meeting place, he waited for the nearest-of-kin to come by. When he appeared, Boaz called to him, "Hey, cousin, come over and sit down. How are you doing? How are your vineyards? How are your fields, your sheep, your cattle? How is your family?" Finally Boaz gets to the point. "Cousin, have I got good news for you!" Then, calling ten of the town elders to join them as witnesses, Boaz made his pitch.

Did you know, cousin, that your kinswoman Naomi has come back from Moab? Well, she has. Her financial situation, however, is grim, and to make ends meet she must sell that piece of property that belonged to her dead husband. You, being his nearest-of-kin, have first refusal. Do you want to buy it? If you don't, then say so, because I'm next in line.

The whole proposition was carefully crafted and surely designed to pressure the nearest-of-kin into making an immediate decision.

"Yes, I'll buy it," the nearest-of-kin replied.

"Fine. It's settled, then," said Boaz. "Oh, I should have mentioned it earlier. There is one small hitch."

"A hitch? What's the hitch?" the nearest-of-kin asked.

"If you buy the land," said Boaz, "you must also take Ruth the Moabite, Naomi's widowed daughter-in-law, as wife so the field will stay in Elimelech's family."

The situation had become much more complicated. It was not merely a matter of exercising an option on a piece of land. If he bought the land, the nearest-of-kin would be forced also to take another wife who was a foreigner. In addition, he would be required to try to have children by her, children who would have their right to a share in his estate.

"In that case," the nearest-of-kin replied, "forget it. I will give up my right to buy the land because it could jeopardize my own children's inheritance. You have no children, Boaz. You buy it. I'll pass on this." Then to

certify the deal, the nearest-of-kin removed his sandal and gave it to Boaz who in turn said to the ten elders:

You are legal witnesses today that I have bought from Naomi everything that belonged to her husband and to her sons, and Ruth the Moabitess now becomes my wife. This assures that Naomi's property remains in the family, and the blood line will continue among Naomi's son's own people here in his own hometown. Do you so attest?

"We do so attest," the elders responded (4:1-11).

So Boaz took Ruth home as his wife, "the Lord blessed her, and she became pregnant and had a son" (4:13). The women of the village named the lad Obed ("Servant") and Obed, according to the text, was the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David (4:17).¹⁵

So here we have it. Boaz, prominent and wealthy though he may have been, was the son of a prostitute. He married a foreign widow who gave birth to Obed, who was the grandfather of the mightiest king in Israel's history and, if one accepts the Matthean genealogy, a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ.

Whether the book of Ruth is dated early or late, and quite aside from any question of the historicity of the narrative, the reader is summoned to explain *how* it ever got into the canon, given the fact that the events and relationships described deviate so sharply from the Deuteronomic code (23:1-5). My reasons for accepting the late date include, in addition to those cited above, another fascinating characteristic of the book. Eight times in the text Ruth's foreignness is stressed (1:4, 22; 2:2, 6, 10, 21; 4:5, 10). Is the writer saying that despite past history, despite the obvious risk, despite the Law, people are not to be excluded from God's community for reasons they cannot alter? If this indeed is the central message of Ruth, it anticipates in striking fashion the revelation given to Simon Peter in Joppa, a revelation that he interpreted as follows: "I now accept the fact that God relates to everyone on the same basis. Whoever reverences God and does what is right is acceptable to God, no matter the race of the person" (Acts 10:34-36).

Communities will of course go on building walls because they are thought to be needed to assure the group's identity. Walls also provide a sense, often a false sense, of stability and security. But in God's family walls are self-defeating if they are used for the purpose of keeping out people—any people—who are sincerely seeking to be members of the family. Can

¹⁵ See Hubbard, pp. 11-23, for a discussion on the difficulties associated with 4:17-22, verses some critics regard as later additions.

we, if we truly are God's people, begin to look and work for the day when walls will not be needed? If so, we will be moving toward the day envisioned by the prophet Zechariah:

Then I saw the angel who had been speaking to me step forward, and another angel came to meet him. The first one said to the other, "Run and tell that young man with the measuring line that there are going to be so many people . . . in Jerusalem that it will be too big to have walls. The Lord has promised that he himself will be a wall of fire around the city to protect it and that he will live there in all his glory (2:3-5).

Some day God's community, the prophet declares, will no longer regard itself as vulnerable, and it will have so many inhabitants that it will be a community, a city without walls.

A Future with Hope

by J. J. M. ROBERTS

J. J. M. Roberts is the William Henry Green Professor of Old Testament Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary. His most recent book is Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary. This homily was delivered in Miller Chapel on March 5, 1992.

Texts: Job 3:20-26

Jeremiah 31:15-17

Isaiah 56:3-7

ISRAEL'S NORMATIVE wisdom tradition asserted that for the righteous there would always be a hope and a future, but that the wicked would experience the loss of hope and the collapse of their future—metaphorically speaking, the lamp of the wicked would go out. Job, however, challenges the optimism of this tradition in the light of his own experience. It is not just the wicked who see their hopes dashed and their future cut off. Despite his righteousness, Job experienced the loss of everything that made his life meaningful, that gave him something to live for; and he cried out to the God who had walled him in to a bleak and joyless present to let him die, to let him escape his hopeless prison of unrelieved suffering.

We may not be as blameless as Job, but most of us who are trying to be faithful to God can identify with Job's lament. We too have experienced moments in our lives when fond dreams and cherished hopes perished irrevocably in the harsh light of hostile reality. If you have been spared such experience, enjoy your reprieve, but don't expect it to last forever. Most of us have or have had some sense of where God was leading us in our future, but those expectations are often disappointed. Some of us have envisioned ourselves in academic careers, and this is the time of year when we anxiously wait to hear whether we have been admitted to the graduate school of our choice or not. Some of you will be disappointed; not every applicant is admitted to a Ph.D. program. Not everyone who is admitted finishes the program. Not everyone who completes the degree finds an academic post, and not everyone who finds such a post keeps it. Others of us see our calling to the ordained ministry, but even among those who finish their ministerial training, not everyone will be called to a church. Some of you have been or will be disappointed in love. You will discover that the man or woman you love so madly does not love you back. He or she may even have the bad sense to marry another person you know to be a jerk. Or worse still, he or

she may marry you and then decide he or she doesn't really love you after all. Divorce, death, or a lingering, crippling illness may suddenly sweep away all your well-made plans of a lifetime. At such moments in life it is difficult to speak confidently of a God-given future.

On November 30, 1976, our only son, who had just turned six, was hit by a car on his way home from school and killed instantly. Three months later, I was denied tenure at the university where I had taught for seven years. Despite the passage of time, I can still remember the sense of having lost my future. I can remember the pain of grief compounded by the anxiety and uncertainty concerning my career. There was month after month of waiting for God to open up an alternative future. God didn't seem to be in any hurry, and there were many moments during that period in which I had the suspicion, sometimes angrily expressed, that God did not know what in the thunder he was doing. Never pray for patience; God's way of granting it is as tedious and painful as hell.

In these moments when we seem stripped of our future it is natural to ask God why. I have heard many people complain that they can think of no reason why God should so destroy their lives. I always thought that was a rather unimaginative response. I could think of lots of reasons why God might do me in; unfortunately there was no way of discovering which, if any, of my surmises was correct. Unlike the readers of the book of Job, who get to eavesdrop on the deliberations in heaven that led to Job's suffering, we are uninformed about whatever discussion in God's divine council has led to the particular twists and turns in our own lives. Few of us will even share Job's dubious privilege of hearing God speak to us from a whirlwind. Despite our cries of anguish, we are not likely to learn why these things have befallen us.

But the word of promise does come to us from the Scriptures that God still has a future for those who wait for him: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" (Jer. 29:11). Such waiting need not be the passionless resignation of those who mouth, "Thy will be done," because they have no will of their own. Job remains the biblical paradigm of patience despite his outrageously violent argument with God. But such waiting does mean that we cannot force our plans upon God. We cannot reject the demands of the gospel to secure the future we envision. God's future may not be the future we had in mind for ourselves, but if we remain faithful, a future with hope will open up. The bereaved mother will not weep forever, the childless eunuch will not be forgotten, the foreign exile will not remain

an outcast, and God will repay the years that the locust has eaten. God promises to more than make up even in this life the future we so fear to turn loose of, and he promises more besides:

Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life (Mk. 10:29-30).

The Love God Does

by CHARLES L. BARTOW

Charles L. Bartow, Carl and Helen Egner Professor of Speech at Princeton Theological Seminary, preached this sermon at the installation service of Linda Elizabeth Owens in Liberty Corner Presbyterian Church, Liberty Corner, New Jersey, on November 15, 1992.

Text: 1 John 4:7-12

“**G**OD IS LOVE.” The church believes that. Linda Owens believes that. You and I believe that. Yet the once extraordinarily popular Irish dramatist, poet, and wit, Oscar Wilde, once said there was enough suffering in any London lane to show God’s love is fancy, not fact.¹ Could he be right and we wrong? When times are good it is easy enough to say it: “God is love.” When times are tough, though—and times are tough right now for many—the words may stick in our throats and nearly choke us. Say it—“God is love”—when a loved one dies, after “the muffled drum’s sad roll has beat the soldier’s last tattoo.”² Say it after “the snuffer [has lowered on some] shining mind to bow and chill the twisting wick of it,”³ after Alzheimer’s, that is. Say it after a young mother in Piscataway, New Jersey, is kidnapped and knifed to death by a stranger and for no reason.

How can it be true that God is love when, in so many places in our world today, “famine, sword, and fire crouch for employment?”⁴ How can it be true that God is love when in a land that used to love to sing, “give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,”⁵ refugees from famine, sword, and fire are often neglected or harassed now, instead of helped, sent back to the places of terror and deprivation from which they have fled? No love for them? Shakespeare put it in a stark and chilling phrase when he said, “all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.”⁶ Life, good Lord, we pray, if there is no sense in it, there can be no love in it. First God must be sane, only then can God be love.

So it is possible to sit in the center of one’s own universe daring God to explain the divine self, like the poet, Robert Frost, speaking to a distant star:

¹ Paul Scherer, “The Gospel According to St. Luke: Exposition,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 385.

² Theodore O’Hara, “The Bivouac of the Dead.”

³ Dorothy Thomas, “Far Echo.”

⁴ Shakespeare, *The Life of King Henry the Fifth*, prologue, lines 7-8.

⁵ Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus.”

⁶ *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, act 5, sc. 5, lines 22-23.

"use language we can comprehend, tell us what elements you blend,"⁷ and like Frost's star, God may seem to give us "strangely little aid,"⁸ no clear answers to our hardest questions, no settled way of salvation. And out there somewhere, far away from heaven's white light, "a grave for all [our] bright hopes with the heavy earth falling."⁹ Is that it? And, if that is it, no wonder we wonder why, why anything? Why has this marriage soured? Why has learning lost its thrill? Why has love lost its value? Now we're at the bottom line, aren't we? If God is love there ought to be some payoff for those of us who believe that he is.

Could it be that God will not define divine love in ways that suit us, in words and actions that appeal to our native instincts? Back in the sixties and seventies love was a "warm fuzzy." Now that's not much, but it does have some value. It's better than a "cold prickly." In the eighties love was romantic again; it was roses and candlelight, tuxedos and evening gowns, a limousine to take you to the prom. In the nineties love has to be made of sterner stuff. We all know that.

Love has to work hard to keep people from harm's way. In Florida people prayed that love would send them deliverance from wind and rain. Then the hurricane came bringing with it destruction such as never before has been seen in this country except, perhaps, during the human havoc of the Civil War nearly a century and a half ago. Then came the Nicaraguan tidal wave, the Hawaiian hurricane, the earthquakes of Egypt, and, through it all, starvation in Somalia and the Sudan, ethnic war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and our own living and dying seemingly beyond our means.¹⁰ No heaven-sent deliverance from harm.

We plead for a logic to love, yet God fills love with the illogic of sacrifice, suffering, forgiveness, and death. Like the homeless and the dispossessed, it has nowhere to lay its head. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us." How? With a Christ and a cross, that's how, with a death wretched as any anyone has died, with a silence deep and lonely as human grief—deeper. God is love. God is love. And God loves us. That is the heart and soul of the gospel. God loves us, not on our terms but on his own, not according to our wants but according to our needs, and not according to the measure of our demand but according to the measure of divine grace.

⁷ Robert Frost, "Choose Something like a Star."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Paul Scherer, "Let God Be God," in *The Word God Sent* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 151.

¹⁰ Hesketh Pearson, *Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1946), p. 331.

Often people ask for far less than God wants to give. They want an answer to the riddle of life. Instead they get life. They want deliverance from death, though there is no deliverance from it. Yet God brings people through death into the divine presence. So death, though inevitable, is not loveless. People want ease, God gives them adventure. They want the homeless housed and the hungry fed, refugees cared for at last and victims of human and natural disasters guarded from further harm. God gives them the chance to do it. They want things to make them happy. God gives them himself and each other. A great Presbyterian preacher of a generation ago, George Arthur Buttrick, expressed it memorably. He said: "We ask, 'what's the use of religion?' [But] God does not 'use' us, and we may not 'use' [God]. The 'use' is to save us from the utilitarian blasphemy of asking, 'What's the use of religion?'"¹¹ And, it must be added, "What's love's bottom line?"

In other words, love, as men and women often think of it today, and as you and I perhaps would have it if we could have our druthers, is not God. Instead, God made known to us in Jesus, the Christ, is love. God defines love. Our varied understandings of love do not define God. Love is something God does to us, among us, with us, for us. With love God makes us a divine possession—each of us and all of us together. Do you want to see God's love in action? Look around you. It is what has brought us all together and made us a church. God's love is not the private possession of any of us. It is God's public possession of all of us. For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, though death do us part, God loves us.

Therefore we may love one another, not as well as God loves us, of course, for we are not God. We are very human beings and our affections run hot and cold. Shakespeare said that "love is not love which alters when it alteration finds."¹² Our love does alter, however, doesn't it? Our caring for one another is not definitive. Now and then men and women have been known to take up their lives for their friends. They even have laid them down for their friends and enemies. But, when faced with such challenges, they also have been tempted to pray, "not thy will, but mine be done." Was that really the last temptation of Christ? Who has not prayed and acted that way one time or another, wishing to know love, yet hoping to duck what love requires in order to be known: life-long, life-deep devotion to the other's well-being?

Yet, despite it all, now and then, even when we have encased ourselves

¹¹ George Arthur Buttrick, *Sermons Preached in a University Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1959), pp. 185-186.

¹² Sonnet 116.

in a shell of self-concern, fearing to risk love, there seeps in a need that somehow cannot be neglected, a claim that cannot be refused, an offer of friendship that, for pity's sake, cannot be turned down, something that, instead of making life bearable, makes it inescapable,¹³ and God has us, for God's own glory and our neighbor's good, however vacillating our affections. "If we love one another," even if we love one another just a little bit, "God abides in us, and God's love is perfected in us." Think of it: God perfects—or brings to completion—the circle of divine caring in you and in me, in the fellowship of the church, in the midst of the world, in flesh and blood and muscle, in what a poet somewhere has called "the clash and scratch of dirt." God's love is as close as the heartbeat of the person sitting next to you in that pew. It is as hearty as a handshake and the passing of the peace. It is as tight and tender as an embrace.

My wife, Paula, and I have been in Liberty Corner, New Jersey for only an hour so far. Yet I love this place. Why? Because on television in the 1950s I saw it photographed and mentioned in a movie melodrama from the 1930s or 40s? Not likely. Then why? Because one of my favorite students, Linda Owens, is here among you as part of your fine ministerial staff? Well, yes, in part. But most of all I love this place, and will love it, because my late mother spent her earliest days on earth here, and because, from her, in my earliest days, I learned that God is love. And I learned to sing the truth: "Praise him, praise him, all ye little children. God is love, God is love." Actually I thought it was "raisin, raisin all ye little children." I was into food at an early age.

At the start of this sermon, you will recall, I indicated that Oscar Wilde once said there was enough suffering in any London lane to show that God's love is fancy, not fact. Yet toward that fancy Oscar Wilde himself came at last to stretch out his arms. In a poem, he wrote: "Come down, O Christ, and help me, reach thy hand, for I am drowning in a stormier sea than Simon on thy Lake of Galilee."¹⁴ So Christ came down, not this time to calm the storm, but to steady the man in the midst of it, for Oscar Wilde was left to die, frankly, in exile, poverty, and disrepute for a breach of Victorian morality. No longer was he the extraordinarily popular Irish dramatist, poet, and wit.

So Christ comes down to where the most neglected, or abused, or disreputable, or grief-stricken hurt today, down to the streets of cities and towns

¹³ Peter S. Hawkins, *The Language of Grace: Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Iris Murdoch* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1983), p. 98.

¹⁴ Oscar Wilde, "E Tenebris."

like Sarajevo, Miami, and Los Angeles, Princeton, Piscataway, and Liberty Corner, down to places where people cry, "why?" He comes to this sanctuary and to this pulpit, too, to speak to you and me with the rugged, wonderful words of Scripture, and with the sometimes clumsy, sometimes eloquent words of us preachers. He comes in unspeakable joy, for he loves us, and in pain, for he loves us as we are, and with a peace that passes understanding. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us." And, "if we love one another, God abides in us, and God's love is perfected in us."

O God, you are love, and you love us perfectly even as we love each other now and then in fits and starts. Grant us to know your love more fully, that, as individuals and as a church, we may grow in love continually, until we attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ and are mature in love. This we ask in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Inheriting the Promise

by MIRIAM THERESE WINTER

Miriam Therese Winter was guest preacher in Miller Chapel on March 2, 1993. Professor of Liturgy, Worship, and Spirituality at Hartford Seminary, her most recent book is The Gospel According to Mary.

Text: Numbers 27:1-8, 11

ZELOPHEHAD died in the wilderness, just as he was about to cross over into the promised land. He had been given a portion of that promise, for the leadership of Israel had divided the land among all the tribes and families. And the leaders had decreed that this inheritance would pass through the eldest son from one generation to the next. But Zelophehad had no sons. He died without male heirs to the fulfillment of his dream. Zelophehad had no sons, but he had five feisty daughters. They too had fled from lives of bondage in body as well as in spirit. They too had crossed the desert after spending nearly all their lives wandering in the wilderness. They too had suffered hardships beyond all human reckoning, and they had managed to survive. Zelophehad's daughters were justifiably upset by the injustice of a system that denied them their share of the promise. So they took their complaint to Moses, and Moses presented their case before God. And God said: "Let the daughters inherit."

The daughters of Zelophehad—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah—oh, let us be thankful that they are not nameless, for too many daughters have been lost in the witness that has been handed down to us from the fathers or their sons—the daughters stood up and spoke out against injustice. And God said to the leaders of the people: "Let the daughters inherit." Indeed, God said, and God still says, "Let the daughters inherit!" In fact, God said and God still says, "Let *my* daughters inherit." For we women, every one of us, are daughters of the living God. Made as we are in her image, born of her womb-love and her wisdom, we, together with her sons, stand directly in line to inherit the fullness of her shalom.

Today, like the daughters whose courage we proclaim, we too stand up and speak out against systemic injustice, against the countless forms of global injustice that threaten to destroy us all. Our deepest desire is simply to add one more dimension to the dialogue of human experience, to introduce yet another innovative step to the dance of the universe, to preach, teach, and live the good news as if it were in fact good news, to cradle with

compassion the whole of a hurting, heartbroken world and to love it to life again.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, they are once again dividing the land among fathers and sons, partitioning human freedom, destroying past, present, and future for generations to come, calling this purge an "ethnic cleansing" and justifying their actions in the name of ancient hatreds that have deep religious roots. And what will their daughters inherit? A world we dare not imagine. Yet we women cannot help but wonder, would all of this be different if life-and-death decisions were made by mothers and daughters, and not solely by fathers and sons?

In Somalia, food is a weapon and disputes are decided by guns. Emaciated babies die because warlords prefer ultimate power to familial blessedness, would rather pour food into the sea than put it before a hungry child, have kept food away from wives and sisters and mothers and daughters. I have been in Ethiopia during the time of its famine. I set up an intensive feeding center there for emaciated children. I know what it is like. I know how it feels when the food runs out, the well runs dry, humanitarian aid is intercepted, and the rains do not come. I also know beyond a doubt that it would indeed be different if decisions about food and family, about home and hope and the future, were the domain of mothers and daughters, and not solely fathers and sons.

In Los Angeles our nation is again on trial. What is really being called into question there are all of our systemic "-isms" driven by a deep, insidious racism controlling precisely who will inherit our constitutional promises.

We, the daughters of God here today, bring to you our perspective on the promises of Christ. It is a fully inclusive perspective. There are things we want to say to society, initiatives we want to take for the benefit of our world and the preservation of our future. We are tired of being apologetic, tired of making a case for ourselves and our presence in the tradition, tired of insisting on our right to inherit opportunities equally with men. We know we were there at the birthpangs, that we women were central to the origins of our Christian tradition, as mother to the Jesus of history who is the incarnate Word of God, giving to Jesus the blood of our blood, which he would pour out for all of us, present throughout his life and ministry, present throughout his suffering and death, present at the cross and beside the tomb, present as eyewitnesses of his resurrection, present at Pentecost when the Spirit set our hearts on fire and liberated our enslaved spirits, present at the birth and development of the movement we call church. We were al-

ways followers of Jesus, and we still are. We were preachers and teachers and leaders once, with full discipleship. And we want that reality again. There is a universe out there waiting for us to lead it to justice and peace, waiting for us to be invited into a partnership of possibilities, a universe longing to receive from us our unconditional love.

We have taken our case to our leaders, but they have been slow to deal with it, so we have gone directly to God. And God says, "Let the daughters inherit. Let *my* daughters inherit. These are *my* daughters. For you are all my children. And I love you, one and all."

On behalf of all my sisters, I pray:

Promise us,
O God of the exodus,
promise you will keep your promise,
for the land we seek seems far from us
and the road we travel is long.
Promise we will come
to the promised land
while we can still remember
the vision and the traditions
to which we once belonged. Amen.

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Moffett, Samuel Hugh. *A History of Christianity in Asia*. Vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1500*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. Pp. xxvi + 560. \$45.00.

Occasionally in each generation an outstanding work appears that becomes a standard reference for future scholars, such as Kenneth Scott Latourette's seven-volume *History of the Expansion of Christianity*. In our time a work of such significance is Samuel Hugh Moffett's *A History of Christianity in Asia* in two volumes, the first of which appeared in late 1992. The study represents the harvest of a lifetime of scholarship by Moffett, who was born in Korea of American Presbyterian missionary parents and was himself a missionary-educator in China and Korea for most of his career until he joined the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1981 as the Henry W. Luce Professor of Ecumenics and Mission. He is now Professor Emeritus.

The scope of Moffett's project is vast—all of Asia, all of Christianity, and all of history, since the great commission was given "on a hill in Asia, at the far western edge of the continent" (p. 4). It is also a pioneering effort; never before has a single study on this single subject by a single scholar endeavored to encompass the whole field. The author is a master of summary and synthesis, writing with passion and perception about a cause to which he has devoted his life. The work is well documented with notes, bibliography, and maps.

Moffett modestly sees his work as a "small step toward restoring global balance to the study of church history" (p. xv). The balanced global view recalls that Jesus was an Asian and the church began in Asia. But Asian church history is a virtual desert compared to western church history among students and scholars. Apart from a few outstanding figures, such as de Nobili, Ricci, Valignano, Carey, Judson, Plütschau, Rhenius, Schwartz, Taylor, and Ziegenbalg, the names and events in the expansion and development of Christianity in Asia are largely unknown, especially in the West—a sign of provincialism in North Atlantic Christianity. And yet the Asian story is every bit as dramatic and important as the western saga. Moffett reminds us that Christian missions started in Asia, that the gospel reached China with missionaries from Persia as early as it reached Scotland with missionaries from Ireland. "The seed was the same: the good news of Jesus Christ for the whole world. . . . But it was sown by different sowers; it was planted in different soil; it grew a different flavor; and it was gathered by different reapers. . . . It was a Christianity that has for centuries remained unashamedly Asian" (p. xiii). One of the special contributions of the study is that it will help Christians—Asians in particular—appreciate the rice roots of Christianity in Asia.

Like the story in the West, the history of Christianity in Asia is marked by controversy. Much of it was competition between Nestorians and Monophysites, going back to the rivalry between Alexandria and Antioch. In Moffett's treatment, Nes-

torius is restored to reasonable doctrinal respectability: "his image as left to history was that created by his enemies," while "judged by his own words, Nestorius is revealed as not so much 'Nestorian' and more orthodox than his opponents gave him credit for" (pp. 176-177). Certainly the Nestorians were a major missionary force across Asia, particularly in China, beginning with the arrival there of Alopen from Persia in 635.

Internal controversy, external persecution, missionary expansion, with the growth and disappearance of Christian communities, are themes that dominate *A History of Christianity in Asia* to 1500, as the author traces the waves of four empires: Greco-Roman, Iranian (Persian), Chinese, and Indian. His last two chapters describe "The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia" and "The Church in the Shadows." After fifteen centuries, says Moffett, "the story of Christianity in Asia beyond the Euphrates nearly ends about where it began, in two small circles of survival . . . one in the northern hills of eastern Syria, and the other in India . . . all that is left of an Asian church that once spread across the continent from Mesopotamia to the Pacific" (p. 496). It is his judgment that what caused the decline of Christianity in Asia was not persecution so much as the church's own decisions "to compromise evangelistic and missionary priorities for the sake of survival" (p. 509).

But it is not the end. Volume two, Moffett reminds us, will see Christianity in Asia "revived and renewed, emerge from the shadows and begin again to outpace the West in the growth of the church and in mission to the world" (p. 509).

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Metzger, Bruce M., Robert C. Dentan, and Walter Harrelson. *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. Pp. viii + 92. \$7.95.

The three authors of this little work about the making of the NRSV are well qualified to comment on the project. All three are long-time members of the RSV Translation Committee, and all shared the final say in shaping the translation of the Old Testament in the NRSV. Bruce Metzger was the chair of the NRSV Translation Committee and as such served as the chair of the final editorial subcommittees for both the Old and New Testament. After the full committee had completed its translation work, those editorial subcommittees were charged with checking the translation of the larger committee for stylistic consistency. Robert Dentan and Walter Harrelson were the other two members of the final editorial subcommittee for the Old Testament.

Their account of the making of the NRSV is presented in four chapters. In the first chapter Robert Dentan gives a brief history of the background behind the NRSV and a fairly accurate description of the goals, organization, and method of work followed by the NRSV Translation Committee. As he says, "The program

was . . . to update grammatical forms, to eliminate sex-biased vocabulary, and to incorporate the results of sound biblical scholarship into the translation" (p. 8). In the second chapter Walter Harrelson discusses the impact of recent discoveries on the NRSV translation. This chapter has a particularly good treatment of the impact of the Qumran scrolls on the translation of the books of Samuel. The third chapter contains Bruce Metzger's reflections on general problems confronting translators of the Bible, and the final chapter offers Walter Harrelson's description and evaluation of the way the NRSV dealt with the issue of inclusive language. In addition to these four chapters, there is a very brief preface, an appendix listing the members of the NRSV Translation Committee as of September 30, 1990, and an index of Scripture references.

This little book is a helpful introduction to understand the making of the NRSV, but it does not tell the whole story. Despite an occasional reference to sharp disagreements within the committee, the book fails to capture the passionate involvement of the translators in their work and the often all-too-human side of translation by committee. This is nowhere more evident than in the authors' discussion of the work of the final editorial committees. The larger committee understood the role of these subcommittees as simply checking for stylistic consistency in the completed translation. The Old Testament editorial subcommittee, however, made *thousands* of changes that had nothing to do with stylistic consistency. To cite just one example, the Hebrew word *šēkār* occurs in twenty-one different Old Testament passages, often in parallel with the Hebrew word for "wine." The old RSV translated *šēkār* as "strong drink" in all but one occurrence. Members of the NRSV committee, however, pointed out that in contemporary American English "strong drink" implies a distilled liquor, and distilled liquors did not exist in ancient Israel. Thus after a long debate the full Old Testament committee, meeting in plenary session, voted to translate *šēkār* as "beer," the meaning the word has in modern Hebrew. Without any explanation or justification the three-person editorial subcommittee changed the translation back to "strong drink." This is only one example; no decision of the full committee was safe from the whim of this three-person subcommittee. If a vote of the full committee displeased them, Metzger and company needed only to agree on an alternate rendering to change the text for "stylistic" reasons. Needless to say, many members of the full committee were infuriated by the cavalier manner in which the subcommittee overruled the expressed will of the full committee. Some even questioned the point of having served for years on the committee when ultimately three men could and did arbitrarily alter the resulting translation without any accountability to the committee of the whole.

One may also fault Harrelson's *uncritical* praise for the NRSV's use of inclusive language. Despite its theological merits, modern inclusivity imposed on ancient texts inevitably involves an element of literary and cultural distortion.

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Newsom, Carol A., and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. *The Women's Bible Commentary*. London: SPCK; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. xix + 396. \$19.95.

This book seeks to provide an interpretation of the biblical works particularly as they affect the topic and interests of women. Forty-one scholars have contributed to this effort to furnish a comprehensive treatment of women and the Bible which reflects the results of recent decades of feminist hermeneutical study. Each of the biblical books is considered in individual chapters. Introductory remarks orient the reader to the general content and structure of the entire book, then a discussion of those passages and themes that are of specific interest to women comprises the bulk of each article. Additional chapters address the Old Testament Apocrypha, early Christian literature outside the New Testament, and the everyday social world of women in the times of each of the testaments. The entire volume is introduced by a useful and concise presentation of the primary issues involved in feminist interpretation of biblical texts.

These essays not only comment upon the female characters in the Bible, but they also go forward to raise new and broader questions about how women read the Bible particularly as women. The absence of women and female images as well as their presence is explored. Issues that are of particular concern to women, both in ancient and contemporary settings, are also highlighted; for instance, family and domestic issues, the status of women in the legal and cultic realms, poverty and societal concerns for the disenfranchised, and the reasons for gender divisions within the community. And throughout, the work refuses to shy away from the difficulties women have in reading the Bible.

As with all multi-author works, the treatments of the individual biblical books are not uniform. Yet this format allows the work as a whole to explore the biblical materials at a depth not possible by only one individual scholar. Though they proceed with a general hermeneutics of suspicion, the contributors bring a variety of methodologies to their interpretations: historical critical, literary and form critical, sociological. None of the contributors relies upon a single methodological standpoint, but all employ a variety of means of interpretation. Such a diversity of treatments is indeed appropriate to this task, for it reflects the variety of types of biblical literature and the differing methods required to elucidate their perspectives on women. The multivalency of approaches reminds us that there is no single correct reading of biblical texts, including those about women.

The editors' decision to incorporate the noncanonical books is especially praiseworthy, for it recognizes that the process of canonization silenced texts significant for women's understanding. This thoughtful consideration of the noncanonical works is a move towards a better understanding of the status of women in early Jewish and Christian times. But perhaps more important, the decision to include these texts acquaints the reader with strong female characters who are often given

less attention than their canonical sisters. This volume thus engages in an exercise of recovering women's lost stories and of opening up a more positive portrait of biblical women than is typically considered by general (canonical) biblical commentators.

The depth of analysis of almost all of the chapters is quite satisfactory. Yet some of the contributors could have pressed more broadly into the biblical materials, especially those books that do not directly address the issue(s) of women. It is admittedly difficult to work with a paucity of details about women themselves. However, other contributors model how such a task might indeed be accomplished (for instance, Carol A. Newsom's treatment of Job). They consider how certain general biblical themes are especially pertinent to the experiences of contemporary women. Such a manner of approaching the text recognizes that women read the entire Bible and look to the entire Bible for meaning, not only to those passages that directly address them.

Each of the essays includes a bibliography at its conclusion, but the brevity and eclectic nature of the citations will most likely prove frustrating to those readers who desire to pursue the issues further. The listings of standard commentaries would better have been omitted, as they are easily located by other means. Instead, this venture would have been an ideal location to include exhaustive bibliographies of all publications by or about women on each biblical book, as such a comprehensive bibliography has not been published elsewhere.

While the linguistic skill of the contributors is clearly evident in each of the articles, this commentary is not a work intended only for scholars. Arguments are presented with lucidity and are quite accessible to readers having no technical expertise in the Bible or knowledge of the biblical languages. That it makes available the insights of feminist scholarship for *all* women questioning the meaning of the Bible is a benefit of this undertaking. Yet its function as a summary of recent feminist interpretation on each of the biblical books, plus the new insights many of the articles bring forth, will prove influential within the academic world as well.

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Freedman, David Noel, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992. Pp. lxxviii + 7,035. \$360.00.

It has been some thirty years since the four volumes of *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* were issued by Abingdon Press, followed by a supplementary volume in 1976; about twenty years since *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* was published in five volumes; and about ten years since the completion of the four volumes of the revised form of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, issued by the Eerdmans Publishing Company. Now *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* has appeared in six volumes, each comprising about 1,200 pages. The editor-in-chief is

David Noel Freedman, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary. The present work (to be identified as *ABD*) is Freedman's crowning achievement, climaxing a distinguished career of teaching and writing. With the assistance of an able editorial staff, and with the advice provided by a panel of consultants, Freedman has brought together an immense amount of scholarly research pertaining to the Bible, contributed by nearly one thousand authors.

The editorial focus of the encyclopedia is on the *realia* of the Bible, especially with reference to archaeology, social institutions, linguistics, literature, and cultural history. One also finds articles concerned with many types of modern critical analysis—textual criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, rhetorical criticism, reader response theory, structuralism, poststructural analysis, and feminist hermeneutics. There is even a special article that surveys contributions on the Old Testament and the New Testament made by Japanese scholars.

Some entries, as one might have imagined, have required the combined efforts of several authors. The entry of "Law" (twenty-three pages long) consists of three articles, one that surveys law as a cultural phenomenon in the ancient near-eastern world where the Hebrew Bible emerged, one that examines the various forms of law present in the Hebrew Bible, and one that surveys religious law in early Judaism of the New Testament period. Another multi-authored article is "Languages," running to seventy-five pages, written by sixteen authors on the many languages and families of languages pertinent to the study of the Bible, including a fascinating group under the heading "Undeciphered Languages and Scripts." The entry on "Jesus Christ" consists of five separate articles, each with its appropriate bibliography, comprising some fifty pages in all. The first is a broad overview of Jesus, assessing him as a historical figure of some two thousand years ago. The second explores the proper methodology to be used in recovering this actual historical figure from the New Testament sources. Related to this is the third article, which surveys scholarly attempts to cull from the New Testament the *ipsissima verba* spoken by the historical Jesus. The fourth article surveys broadly the teaching of Jesus. The fifth article focuses more on Jesus Christ as a religious figure, particularly how he became the object of worship in the early Christian church. There are also additional articles on "Christ" and on "Christ, Death of." Another fifty-page composite entry is "Christianity," which consists of eight separate articles covering various aspects of the emergence of Christianity in the various regions of the Mediterranean world.

The scope of the dictionary can be seen in yet another aspect. Entries are provided for individual Nag Hammadi tractates and for specific Dead Sea Scrolls (such as the "Copper Scroll"). Still other articles that might (or might not) have been expected are "Computers and Biblical Studies," "Euphemisms in the Bible," "Iconography and the Bible," "Jewelry, Ancient Israelite," "Mathematics, Algebra, and Geometry," "Roads and Highways," "Ugarit," "Yohanan ben Zakkai," and many

others. The article on "Flora" refers to each of the 128 different plants mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

On the other hand, apart from several remarkably comprehensive articles concerning theological topics (such as the fifty-page article on "Righteousness"), the editors acknowledge that *ABD* contains fewer lexicographic entries of this kind than earlier Bible dictionaries. The explanation offered for such a decision is that "because word studies have been very ably covered in earlier dictionary series, we have felt it appropriate to concentrate on other types of dictionary/encyclopedia entries." Nevertheless, one finds entries on a considerable number of such topics, from "Angels" to "Wrath of God (OT)." Strangely enough, however, an entry on "church" is not to be found (although one part of the eight articles on "Christianity" deals with "Early Social Life and Organization").

The Revised Standard Version has served as the basic text in compiling a list of all names encountered in the Bible. This means, however, that the article entitled "Junias" deals throughout with the woman who is called "Junia" in the King James Version and in the New RSV (Rom. 16:7), and concludes that the masculine name did not exist in antiquity. The reviewer can find no article dealing with the cryptogram "Sheshach" (Jer. 25:26; 51:41), even though the editors assert that they include "all RSV words that represent transliterations of original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek words." A curious anomaly occurs in the article on "Feminist Hermeneutics" (by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza), which is divided into three sections identified as "A," "B," and "D."

The editor-in-chief confesses in the preface that "for each topic assigned there are many more that could be assigned, and between every two entries there could exist any number of others, all worthy of consideration." At the same time, most students who consult these six substantial volumes will feel gratified that the limits of shelf space (and of pocketbooks!) have also been taken into account. All in all, everyone must acknowledge that *ABD* is a landmark in the production over the centuries of more than one hundred Bible dictionaries.

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Brown, Cheryl Anne. *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. 240. \$17.95.

Cheryl Anne Brown presents a fascinating and very readable comparison and contrast of the portraits of four women in the Bible and two later works, *Biblical Antiquities* (B.A.), written by an anonymous author known as Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* (J.A.). The four women, Deborah, Jephthah's daughter, Hannah, and the witch of Endor, take on different personalities and roles that match the purposes of the books in which they appear. This second book in Westminster/John Knox Press' new series, *Gender and the Biblical Tradition*, ably con-

tributes to the editors' purpose to "explore the role of gender within the biblical texts and document its influence on subsequent tradition."

Brown's introduction identifies the two first-century works and their authors. Flavius Josephus defected from the Jewish army to Rome during the Roman takeover of Israel (66-70 C.E.). He explains his twofold purpose at the beginning of *J.A.*: to describe favorably the Jewish people and their religion to the Greco-Roman world, and to exhort readers to obey the will of God. The author known as Pseudo-Philo received this pseudonym because the manuscript of the work was discovered attached to two works by Philo of Alexandria. The anonymous writer of *B.A.* emphasizes two themes: the requirements and promises of the covenant and the consequences of weak leadership of the Jewish people.

Brown's following chapters analyze the portrayals of the four women in the Bible, *B.A.*, and *J.A.* They set the stage for a careful comparison of the different women in the two first-century books.

Josephus characterizes Deborah as a Greco-Roman prophetess who conforms to the author's "opinion that women should not hold authority over men" (p. 82). But Pseudo-Philo uses feminine imagery to make her both Moses' female counterpart and the personification of wisdom.

Jephthah's daughter becomes for Josephus the ideal Roman woman by her willingness to place the welfare of her family ahead of herself. Pseudo-Philo gives the daughter a name, Seila, and compares her to the would-be sacrificial victim Isaac and to Jerusalem and the Temple. From this perspective her death takes on redemptive value and symbolizes the destruction at the hands of the Romans in 70 C.E.

Josephus drastically diminishes Hannah's character and role, subordinating her to her husband Elkanah and eliminating the hymn she sings in the Bible (1 Sam. 2:1-10). But Pseudo-Philo significantly augments her status as mother not only of Samuel but of all Israel. In her song she nourishes the people with milk and words of wisdom, thus becoming a symbol of hope that the Jewish community will survive and that God will send a new leader to guide the people.

But Josephus characterizes the witch of Endor more positively than the other three women. She appears hospitable, generous, and loyal to the king. In addition she reflects the Roman respect for white witchcraft. But Pseudo-Philo portrays her as a Gentile idolator, and eliminates the biblical scene of hospitality (1 Sam. 28:22-25) from his description of her.

In her final chapter, Brown comments on how these different portraits contribute to the goals of the two first-century writers. In addition she theorizes about the provenance of *B.A.* from the imagery in Pseudo-Philo's book: it belonged to a Syrian community among whom the feminine aspect of wisdom had a prominent place, and it was composed after 70 C.E. These suggestions contribute to the ongoing discussion about where and when the book was composed. Brown further concludes that the women in Pseudo-Philo illustrate the importance and credibility

of women in that community. This use of literary features to enhance our understanding of sociological issues, while inconclusive, contributes to the effort to identify the social location and situation of biblical and postbiblical communities.

Brown brings to her task a wealth of knowledge about Jewish materials from ancient times to the first century. This information appears in copious notes for specialists who wish to pursue further study in the Bible, first-century Judaism and Christianity, and the status and roles of women in that period. The book's highly readable style makes it a valuable overview for serious readers—pastors, students, and teachers of religious studies, women's issues, anthropology, and literature.

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Parker, D. C. *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. xxiii + 349. \$85.00.

Codex Bezae is an important parchment manuscript of the Gospels and Acts with the text in Greek and Latin on facing pages. The codex once belonged to Theodore Beza, who eventually presented it to the Library of the University of Cambridge, where it is today. Variouslly dated by scholars to the fourth, fifth, or sixth century, the codex has been studied over the years with greater attention than has perhaps been devoted to any other New Testament manuscript. One of its intriguing features is the divergent wording of the text, particularly in the Acts of the Apostles, but also in the Gospels. In Acts, for example, Codex Bezae has a text that is eight percent longer than the form of text that has been commonly taken to be the text of that book. Among the special readings presented by this codex in the Gospels, not found elsewhere, is the saying attributed to Jesus in Luke 6:5, "On the same day he [Jesus] saw a man working on the sabbath and said to him, 'Man, if you know what you are doing, you are blessed; but if you do not know, you are accursed and a transgressor of the law.'"

The most recent scholarly analysis of this manuscript comes from the careful and detailed research undertaken by David C. Parker, who is Tutor in the New Testament at The Queen's College, Birmingham, England. On the basis of a painstaking scrutiny of the distinctive physical and palaeographical features of Codex Bezae, and by carefully comparing its Greek and Latin texts, Parker deals successively with questions pertaining to the origins of the manuscript, its physical layout, and its type of text.

The five parts of Parker's research discuss with balanced judgment (1) the palaeography and codicology of the manuscript; (2) the scribe and his orthography; (3) the dozen or more correctors who made greater or lesser changes here and there; (4) the bilingual tradition represented in the two forms of text; and, finally, (5) a consideration of the history of the travels of the manuscript from its place of origin until it came into the hands of Beza.

Over the centuries of scholarly investigation devoted to this famous manuscript, the most diverse theories of its origin have been proposed, stretching from Britain in the West to Jerusalem in the East, and including many places between. Parker makes an interesting case for Berytus (Beirut), where a famous school of legal studies flourished from about 200 C.E. onward. Here the teaching was done in Latin until about the fourth or fifth century, though the predominant literary culture was Greek.

By way of conclusion Parker identifies the special character of the text of Codex Bezae as follows: "a tendency to recast the text in a more vernacular mould; harmonization in the Gospels, and the influence of the context (especially the close context) everywhere; the introduction of material from other sources; interaction between the [Greek and Latin] columns; and, explaining how all this came about—a freedom to transmit the text loosely" (p. 258).

This book presents mature, scholarly judgments, expressed with clarity and balance. It is comprehensive in scope and will remain a classic of its kind. The Cambridge University Press is to be congratulated on the elegance of typography exhibited throughout the pages of this volume, whose high quality of content is matched by its outward format.

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Hartin, P. J., and J. H. Petzer, eds. *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991. Pp. vii + 326. \$80.99.

This valuable collection of essays supplements *A South African Perspective on the New Testament*, which was edited by the editors of the present volume and reviewed in the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 9 (February 1988): 73-75. *Text and Interpretation* focuses especially on newer forms of interpretation. Its arrangement is indicative of its interests: of its three parts, the "Sender" includes only one essay; the second part, the "Text," is studied in five essays; while the third section, the "Receptor," receives the attention of ten chapters.

These varied essays reflect the situation of scholars who, on the international scene, are keeping in touch with both European and North American scholarship better than many scholars in either of those areas do with the other; on their own African scene, these essays reveal a growing sensitivity to the interdependence of scholarship and public social and political life. Thus in the section on the "Receptor," feminism is discussed (cautiously) by S. J. Nortje, liberation theology by E. H. Shaffer, historical materialism by W. R. Domeris, who in a separate essay also examines sociology and sociohistory, while J. A. Draper studies contextual exegesis. Equally relevant to the current scene is the article by P. J. du Plessis on fundamentalism as an interpretive approach to the New Testament.

Other aspects of the "Receptor" are discussed in essays on reception theory by

B. J. Latigan, rhetorical criticism by W. Wuellner (the only non-South African scholar represented in the book), and deconstruction by P. J. Hartin.

Essays on the "Text" include J. H. Petzer on textual criticism, P. J. Maartens on semiotics, A. H. Snyman on discourse analysis, A. G. Van Aarde on narrative criticism, and J. G. du Plessis on speech act theory. W. S. Vorster on historical criticism is the single entry under the heading of the "Sender," although of course historical and authorial considerations appear in many of the other essays.

Each of the essays sketches the structure of the method in question, and then applies it to a New Testament text or texts. Useful bibliographies of very considerable breadth follow each essay. Thus theory and practice are effectively joined.

It does not take much courage, most of the time, to be a professor of New Testament in a seminary or university in the United States. What is most striking about this collection of essays is, first the way the authors move within or from their inherited Reformed tradition with its longstanding admiration for traditional learning, a motivation that leads them to explore not only traditional hermeneutics, but also linguistics and literary criticism, and, second, how many of the essays venture courageously to draw lines of connection between the New Testament and the methods of New Testament scholarship on the one hand, and the public life of their troubled and rapidly changing country on the other. Those of us who work in what for the moment are more stable conditions may take heart from this move toward engagement on the part of our colleagues in South Africa, and be reminded that a similar call is laid upon us.

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Hesselink, I. John. *Calvin's Concept of the Law*. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992. Pp. xii + 311. \$27.90.

The publication of this long-awaited book is an important event for anyone serious about the study of John Calvin's thought. The author, a minister in the Reformed Church in America and the Albertus C. Van Raalte Professor of Systematic Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, produced an early version of this book years ago as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Basel under the guidance of Karl Barth. Even in its unpublished form, the study has over the years attracted considerable attention among students of Calvin, and it has profitably been used and cited (for example, by this reviewer) in various books and essays. After an inexplicably prolonged delay, it is an occasion for rejoicing that Hesselink's study is finally published, and is thus more widely available.

The book is important for several reasons. A systematic study of Calvin's theory of law, such as this is, fills an enormous hole in Calvin scholarship. It is quite remarkable that in the case of Calvin, for whom law played so central a role, no

investigation similar to Hesselink's exists. Of course, numerous authors, many of whom are cited by Hesselink, have treated the subject in one way or another. However, their discussion is usually either oblique and occasional or subordinate to other interests, rather than undivided and comprehensive.

Hesselink's only distant rival is Josef Bohatec, who in 1934 published a famous study called *Calvin und das Recht* (*Calvin and the Law*), much of which was then incorporated into his magisterial volume, first published in 1936, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche* (*Calvin's Theory of State and Church*). However, Bohatec's focus was more on the relation of Calvin's general idea of law to civil and ecclesiastical law and organization, and therefore his study was not as systematically or expansively theological as Hesselink's. Nor, of course, was he able, publishing when he did, to take account, as Hesselink does so ably, of the vast theological discussion that has occurred since the thirties. In any case, Bohatec's book has (regrettably) never been translated, and so remains widely inaccessible, whatever its merits.

Hesselink not only takes up a neglected subject. He does it with compelling lucidity, skill, and imagination. The book is eminently readable and well organized, and should be of great use to pastors and interested lay people, as well as to experts. The author commands the relevant primary and secondary sources (in the original languages), and therefore his general and particular interpretations are well substantiated and carefully argued. The text is not unduly encumbered with scholarly controversies, though where relevant, differences are clearly outlined, and the author's position made plain efficiently and reasonably. For the more advanced reader, the footnotes are a goldmine of primary citations from Calvin's work, and of sophisticated theoretical discussions.

Hesselink masterfully disposes of the old canard about Calvin's "legalism." A primary concern of the book is to demonstrate how central to all of Calvin's thought is the idea that law drives toward grace, a basic conviction that undergirds "Calvin's Dynamic Understanding of the Law" (to invoke the title of Hesselink's concluding chapter). Contrary to certain later Reformed doctrines, Calvin did not hold, according to Hesselink, that the divine covenant could be divided into a "Covenant of Works" and a "Covenant of Grace." For Calvin, there was only one covenant, a covenant that eternally combines law and gospel, demand and promise, justice and love.

Hesselink's analysis of the three uses of law—the pedagogical or adversarial, the political, and the "normative" or "restored" use—is particularly illuminating. There is an especially balanced and thoughtful discussion of the role of natural law and the decalog in Calvin's work, and a trenchant examination of the third use of the law, something Hesselink rightly identifies as "a hallmark of Reformed theology."

The discussion of the political use of the law is insightful so far as it goes, although here one might have wished that Hesselink had attended more fully to some of the central concerns of Bohatec's classic work. It is worth recalling that Calvin

devoted a large portion of the final version of the *Institutes* (much of Book IV) to questions of church and civil law, and that much of Calvin's influence throughout northern Europe, Great Britain, and, eventually, colonial America was transmitted in special relation to questions of the organization of church and state.

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Barth, Karl. *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*. Vol. 1. Edited by Hannelotte Reiffen. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. Pp. lxii + 490. \$39.95.

The appearance, at long last, of Barth's 1924-25 lectures on dogmatics in Göttingen in a fine English translation is a welcome event for those interested in the development of Barth's theology. An important space in the corpus of Barth's work has now been filled in, a space between the 1921 Romans commentary and the 1927 Münster *Christian Dogmatics in Outline*, itself not yet fully translated.

These Göttingen lectures, a three-semester series, are important for several reasons. In the first place, they are the only complete dogmatics that Barth wrote, a task he confesses he undertook with great trepidation and anxiety. They are, however, remarkably lively, honest, even humorous. Barth was clearly an engaging, though demanding, lecturer.

Second, they can be seen as a link between Barth's so-called dialectical stage and his so-called analogical stage. The Göttingen lectures modify the common assumption among Barth scholars that the 1931 book on Anselm was a decisive turning point in Barth's methodology. Rather, the Göttingen lectures give evidence of an intriguing mixture of both dialectic and analogy. Barth is convinced that because theology attempts to speak of the mystery of God, it must not be bound and gagged by a system, a method, a rule. In his effort to display the utterly free, dynamic, even eccentric character of Christian theology, Barth uses all the conceptual tools and materials at his disposal.

A third reason why the Göttingen dogmatics is important is that they serve as a helpful and revealing comparison with the much more massive, yet incomplete, *Church Dogmatics*. Both continuity and discontinuity are in evidence by comparing these two dogmatic efforts. Instances of discontinuity are intriguing: Barth's view of infant baptism, for example, changed dramatically from the Göttingen lectures to the *Church Dogmatics*, IV/4 (fragment). His willingness to consider the idea of a suffering God is greater in the *Church Dogmatics* than in the Göttingen lectures. His approach to the doctrine of predestination dramatically shifts from the early to the later work. In the Göttingen lectures, Barth upholds a fairly standard Reformed position on election and reprobation and is satisfied, when confronted with the objectionable aspects of the doctrine, to appeal to mystery. The *Church Dogmatics*

takes an entirely different approach to election and reprobation with the idea of Christ as the Elect One and the corresponding view that all persons are both elect and reprobate in Christ.

The value of this volume is greatly enhanced by an excellent, complete, and elegant introduction by Daniel L. Migliore. The introduction provides historical background as well as important features of the Göttingen lectures in particular and Barth's theology in general. It highlights Barth's insistence that dogmatics must serve the church and the church's proclamation. Other themes that are discussed and illuminated include Barth's relationship with Reformed orthodoxy, Lutheran orthodoxy, and modern Protestant liberalism, as well as theological issues of key significance in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. The introduction provides a fine preparation for a reading of the text; both introduction and text provide a more accurate and interesting picture of the development of Barth's theology.

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Lossky, Nicholas, José Míguez Bonino, John S. Pobee, Thomas Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Pauline Webb, eds. *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. Pp. xxi + 1196. \$79.95.

Rarely does one have the opportunity to review a volume as significant and as well designed, written, and edited as this dictionary. No single source is available that provides a more complete and up-to-date body of information about the history, theology, communions, and leaders involved in the effort to achieve Christian unity, as well as critics and opponents of conciliar ecumenism. The articles are superbly written and provide the basic facts as well as sources for additional information. As a whole the book represents an indispensable resource. The editors and the members of the editorial board are all distinguished theologians and respected participants in the ecumenical movement. They know the history firsthand, and they represent a wide spectrum of Christian traditions: Protestant, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Roman and Anglo-Catholic, and two adherents of the Jewish faith. Though five of the twenty-two who served as editors and members of the editorial board are Methodists, Emilio Castro's comment in the preface can hardly be disputed. "The writers and editors," he says, were "chosen for their familiarity with how the twentieth century ecumenical movement has unfolded and for their engagement in the diversity of issues on the agenda of the churches." Among the 330 contributors—women and men, clergy and lay, evangelicals and non-evangelicals, charismatics and non-charismatics—are recognized spokespersons from scores of Christian traditions and fifty countries.

The limitation one often finds in reference works of this kind is the brevity and general nature of the articles because contributors are obliged to restrict their com-

ments to the barest facts with little or no mention of additional resources the reader may consult. This limitation is evident in only a few of the essays in this volume. Virtually every subject one might consider, even those indirectly or remotely related to the ecumenical movement, is included and thoroughly discussed. Some themes and organizations, such as the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, the UNDA, the Church Growth movement, Pentecostals, Christian Base Communities, and the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, are all treated individually. In fact, the list of subjects is so comprehensive that it is difficult to find omissions. Occasionally, one can find a reference that could be enhanced with further details, such as the allusion to Clarence Jordan's Koinonia Farm in Georgia (p. 858) or George McLeod's Iona community in Scotland (p. 617). But these are minor imperfections that most readers will not notice or mind.

More than thirteen hundred individuals are referred to in the dictionary, and some 110 are treated in individual articles. The most obvious oversights are Henry Sloane Coffin, J. Ross Stevenson, Walter Freytag, E. Stanley Jones, Kenneth Scott Latourette, and Robert E. Speer, who are scarcely mentioned or not at all. Also, I think it unfortunate—surely modesty on their part—that none of the editors is treated in separate articles. I find a few of the essays on individuals overly laudatory, such as the one on Charles Henry Bent, but these are minor imperfections in view of the scope and overall value of the work.

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Conkin, Paul K. *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990. Pp. xi + 186. \$32.50/\$10.95.

On August 6, 1801, thousands of people began gathering for religious services at Cane Ridge in Bourbon County, Kentucky. During the following week, ministers' exhortations elicited sobbing, shouting, and fainting from the throngs. To its supporters, the Cane Ridge revival soon became a symbol of the outpouring of God's Spirit; to its detractors, a synonym for disorder and excess. Subsequent historians have treated Cane Ridge as the epitome of an exuberant, often boisterous revivalism that remade American Protestantism. Yet as Edwin S. Gaustad notes in the blurb on the cover of the book, "Cane Ridge is mentioned far more often than it is understood." Thanks to Paul Conkin's fine study, we now have a deeper comprehension of the events at Cane Ridge and their place in the history of American Christianity.

Those who summoned the gathering were Presbyterian ministers, and they were following a tradition more than 150 years old. In the early 1600s among both Scottish Presbyterians and their emigré kinfolk in Ulster, churches made celebrations of the Lord's Supper into elaborate religious festivals. People came from a distance to participate in these events, and solemn spiritual purpose mingled with a carnival

atmosphere. At Cambuslang near Glasgow in 1742, one of the most notable sacramental seasons occurred. Perhaps as many as thirty thousand people gathered to hear evangelical preachers, among them George Whitefield who is known to Americans as the leading figure of the Great Awakening. The emotional fervor later associated with Cane Ridge was already in evidence at Cambuslang as men and women cried out or swooned. In America, the Scots and Ulster Scots continued the sacramental seasons. Thus when Presbyterian ministers announced an observance of the Supper to be held at Cane Ridge in August 1801, they were honoring a venerable tradition.

Yet if Cane Ridge had roots in the Presbyterian heritage, it also burst that tradition asunder. Presbyterianism, Conkin argues, rested on a delicate balance between well-articulated doctrine and religious experience, between respect for the rights of the laity and deference to an educated, duly ordained clergy. The explosive passions unleashed at Cane Ridge destroyed that equilibrium. The distinction between clergy and laity dissolved as those "slain in the spirit"—lay men, women, and even children—began admonishing the unconverted. Ordered worship disintegrated into physical jerking, visions, and extemporaneous exhortation. Many who led the exercises at Cane Ridge soon found themselves uncomfortable within the constraints of Presbyterian doctrine and polity. Turning from a Calvinist understanding of salvation to an Arminian view, they found their way into the Christian movement of Barton Stone, joined the Shakers, or formed the new Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Viewing Cane Ridge and its aftermath, one must conclude with Conkin that it was "something very primordial, primitive, or visceral," defying "self-conscious conceptualization." At least it defied the capacities of Presbyterians to define and control it.

Others had far more success in profiting from Cane Ridge. Baptists and Methodists, who in the 1790s were far weaker than the Presbyterians in Kentucky, surged numerically after 1800 while the once dominant group lagged far behind. Baptists and Methodists succeeded in large measure because they enthusiastically accepted the revivalism and Arminianism symbolized by Cane Ridge. Shorn of its sacramental connection and Calvinist theology, Cane Ridge lived on in the camp meetings that became ubiquitous throughout the South and in many parts of the North.

Although one might wish that Conkin had devoted more attention to the political and economic context of the Cane Ridge revival, he succeeds admirably in the task he has set for himself: to depict the doctrinal and institutional meaning of an event that marked a watershed in the history of American Protestantism. For Presbyterians, who constitute a large percentage of the readers of this journal, Conkin's story is especially instructive. Faced with diminishing membership roles for nearly a quarter of a century, contemporary Presbyterians are often tempted to conclude that their decline is of recent vintage. Conkin's thoughtful book serves as a needed reminder that the real demographic revolution weakening Presbyterianism's place

relative to other denominations took place over 175 years ago. Ironically, it was the transmutation of a uniquely Presbyterian tradition—the sacramental season—that played a major role in that change.

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Luker, Ralph E. *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991. Pp. xiv + 445. \$39.95.

White, Ronald C., Jr. *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990. Pp. xxiv + 309. \$35.00.

These two studies, timely in their consideration of the difficulties of race relations in American culture, present complementary analyses of the social gospel. Looking freshly at the sources in light of their own experience of the civil rights movement and the centrality of the social gospel for Martin Luther King, Jr., Luker and White challenge the long-accepted presupposition that the influence of the social gospel was constrained by its focus on immigration, urbanization, and the rising labor movement from 1885 to 1912. Instead, they each advance an interpretation that stresses the diversity of the social gospel movement as well as the relationship of the social gospel to extra-ecclesial reform forces in American life.

White's book, based on his 1984-1985 Rauschenbusch Lectures at Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary, is organized in three parts: "Retreat from Reconstruction, 1877-1897"; "Darkness or Dawning? 1898-1908"; and "New Ventures in Racial Reform, 1909-1925." White contends that the movement was not oblivious to the realities of bigotry and racism; he holds rather that the social gospel was diverse and multifaceted. In part, he intimates, because nearly ninety percent of blacks lived in the South before 1900, any consideration of race in the study of the social gospel necessitates a reconfiguration of the boundaries. "The story," he writes, "is complex, involving change, development, regression, and growth" (p. xiii). Arguing that the movement be understood against the backdrop of religiously inspired pre-Civil War abolitionism, White explores how the ideal of equality was compromised by adamant southern resistance during the post-Reconstruction era. Swayed by the forces of racial conservatism, the Supreme Court, in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, declared "separate but equal" to be consistent with the fourteenth-amendment guarantee of equal protection under the law, and thus sanctioned separation of the races in America.

This essential separation of the races made it all but impossible for northern, white social gospel leaders to use their personal experience as a referent except for what White calls "the missionary education bridge"—the effort sponsored by the American Missionary Society—to support the education and the religious renewal of the black community. The opportunity to serve as teachers, administrators, and

trustees of institutions like Howard, Atlanta University, Fisk, Hampton, and Tuskegee provided important opportunities for northern white reformers to experience firsthand the black struggle for freedom and self-determination. Graduates of these institutions—all of which received significant church support—included George E. Haynes, who later served as the director of the Urban League and the Commission on Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches, and W. E. B. DuBois, the founder of the NAACP. It is important, White reminds us, to look at changes in the views of the white social gospel leaders after working with these black leaders. The social gospel pioneer, Washington Gladden, is a case in point.

A supporter and former president of the American Missionary Society, Gladden adjusted his own views about race, which had been more accommodationist, after listening to and talking with DuBois and Kelly Miller, a Howard University professor, at a 1903 meeting in Atlanta focusing on the Negro church. Deeply affected by DuBois' analysis of the impact of racism on black self-perception, Gladden returned to his Columbus, Ohio pulpit to reflect in a different, critical vein about the impact of segregation on black advancement. White interprets Gladden's "conversion" as a paradigm of change and growth in the appreciation of the complexity of American racial problems. Gladden had once been associated with the more accommodationist views of Booker T. Washington, the head of Tuskegee Institute who emphasized industrial education but was more reluctant to challenge the white political order about civil rights.

Luker's views about the origin of the social gospel in the "hub of antebellum religious reform" (p. 31) are quite consistent with White's. The social gospel, which many viewed as a liberal and liberating response to social and cultural dislocations of post-Civil War industrialism, needs also, Luker cautions, to be understood as a conservative response intended to keep religion relevant during a period of intense change. With an impressive introduction establishing the connections and the continuities between early and late nineteenth-century strategies for dealing with the racial problem, Luker embarks on a three-part narrative: "The Decline of Nineteenth Century Racial Reform"; "The Racial Mission Renewed"; and "Civil Wrongs, Civil Rights, and Theological Equations."

One of the continuities across the century was the persistent interest of American Christians in the American Colonization Society, founded in 1816 to send free blacks to Liberia. The society continued in the 1890s to provide a discussable social alternative to integrating blacks into American institutions. Supported by the Episcopal bishop Henry C. Potter and African Methodist Episcopal bishop Henry McNeal Turner, among many others, the idea of African colonization continued to intrigue those who did not believe an integrated society would serve well either blacks or whites. In addition, as in earlier periods in American history, colonization was viewed as a means for establishing a beachhead for civilizing and Christianizing the African continent.

The dominant strategy expressing the social Christian aspiration in race relations

was directed towards education. While many whites were ambivalent about the claims of those who demanded full civil equality, a strong consensus emerged about the need for education. In the aftermath of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, it became clearer that such a commitment was compatible with segregation and that social Christianity could harbor accommodationist as well as critical views about American racism. Put another way, a social-Christian argument could be marshalled to support either Booker T. Washington or W. E. B. DuBois.

As the United States continues to struggle with the painful tragedy of race relations and the continuing realities of ethnic division, the church needs to understand its own implication and complicity in the problem. The church, as St. Augustine taught, is a *corpus permixtum*, a mixed body in which the wheat and the tares grow together. These two studies enrich our understanding of the nineteenth-century effort to apply Christian principles to the social order and remind us of the power and persistence of race as a divisive force. From the standpoint of social gospel historiography, they provide persuasive arguments that the boundaries of the movement need to be expanded to encompass the voluntary societies of the pre-Civil War period and the secular reform agencies—like the Urban League and the NAACP—that carried forward the work of racial reform into the twentieth century. As both White and Luker suggest, the social gospel encompassed a variety of views and visions about American race relations and the prospect for achieving liberty and justice for all.

Eugene Y. Lowe, Jr.
Princeton University

Dussel, Enrique, ed. *The Church in Latin America, 1492-1992*. Kent, England: Burns & Oates; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992. Pp. x + 501. \$49.95.

Over the last two decades, an extraordinary group of church historians, Catholic and Protestant, working together in the Commission for the Study of Church History in Latin America (CEHILA), has been engaged in writing and rewriting the history of Christianity in Latin America. To date, they have produced an eleven-volume *General History of the Church in Latin America*, now being published in Spanish, and quite a number of other books and monographs.

During the last few years, as so much attention has been focused on the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus in America, and as those who have been the victims of centuries of colonial exploitation are raising their voices in criticism of it, these historians have given much of their attention to research on the role the church has played in legitimating, supporting, and, at times, taking a more critical stance toward this process.

The Church in Latin America, 1492-1992 makes available, to an English-speaking audience, the results of this research in short chapters written by those who have been most involved in the larger project. It is edited by Enrique Dussel, Argentin-

ian-born philosopher, theologian, and historian, who has been the president of CEHILA and general editor of the eleven-volume history mentioned above. To this volume, he has contributed an excellent general introduction and four chapters.

The unique thing about this book is that, as a scientific history written by leading Latin American scholars, it is written "from the underside of history," presenting the story of the conquered peoples and the church's relation with them.

The first of three parts presents a chronological survey of the historical development of the church throughout the continent, with chapters dealing with the earliest relations of the church with the indigenous population, its participation in the emancipation process and the emergent nation states, its struggle to find its place in liberal states and populist regimes, and developments that have taken place since the Second Vatican Council.

Chapters in the second section deal with the history of the church in the various regions, including the Caribbean and among Hispanics in the United States. And a final section deals with special subjects, among them, Protestantism in Latin America, the church and African-American slavery, recent developments in Latin American theology and the Christian Base Communities, and the story of the participation of the church in the defense of human rights.

For those in North America who are not only interested in learning more about the church in Latin America and the role it has played over the centuries, but would like to reflect on it from the perspective of the vast majority of the people, marginalized and oppressed, this book is in a category all by itself. It may be of even greater value for those who have a reading knowledge of Spanish and want to do further study in some particular aspect of that history. Most chapters have an excellent select bibliography. In addition, the last thirty pages of the book provide a listing of both unpublished and published sources and an extensive bibliography.

I consider this to be a valuable addition to the literature available in English about the history of the church in Latin America. It stands out because of the quality of the research done by a group of creative and committed scholars. But it does have a few limitations. This volume claims to present the story of the conquered people, but in it, the conquered people and their descendants are not telling *their own story*. It is entitled *The Church in Latin America* but Brazil, representing about half of that continent does not, in my judgment, receive the attention it deserves. And while the Catholic Church was the only church during most of this period, except in the Caribbean region, in the present century it has not only been growing rapidly but is becoming a significant force in the religious development of Latin American people as well as in society. By dealing with it in one short chapter near the end, this volume largely leaves out an important factor shaping the development of Christianity in Latin America in recent times and destined to play a more important role in the future.

Richard Shaull
Princeton Theological Seminary

Martin, William. *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story*. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1991. Pp. 735. \$25.00.

Among the biographies of twentieth-century preacher-evangelists, few can equal in kaleidoscopic detail and dimensions William Martin's analysis and survey of the ministry and personal character of Billy Graham, under the fitting title: *A Prophet with Honor*. In the course of thirty-seven data-filled chapters, Martin (of Rice University) covers Graham's career from its "Genesis" to "Finishing the Course" and also supplies ninety-eight pages of notes and sixteen pages of indices. Undoubtedly Martin was the person for this assignment; whoever persuaded him to do it can rejoice in the completion of a work marked by an enormous wealth of detail and objective evaluations, resulting in a portrait that cannot fail to temper Graham's admirers and silence his critics.

What can one say upon reaching the final page of Martin's comprehensive diary of Graham's life and career? In the United States where, during several centuries, a cluster of evangelists enjoyed celebrated careers in the propagation of the Christian faith (Moody, Finney, Sunday, Whitefield, and others), what characteristics stand out in defining the Graham story? First, no other testator to the meaning and challenge of the Christian gospel has reached more people through contemporary mass media than Graham. Second, no modern presenter of his/her experience of Christian belief has stated a case so free from reservations as Graham has before massive audiences of many racial, class, and intellectual distinctions. And third, no other modern evangelist has exercised his influence over an organization of such proportions and at the same time kept his own feet from slipping.

Of course Graham has his "warts," but none has ever tripped him up, unlike some recent cases in America. He is human enough to have loved the limelight and has sought it on every possible occasion. Yet, to quote Kipling, he has been "able to walk with kings and not lose the common touch." Personal encounters and relationships with persons in the "seats of the mighty" have been numerous, and sometimes his resultant performance mixed religion, politics, and statecraft in a manner seemingly intended merely to enhance Graham's ego. Yet here and there his word has influenced for good many critical national and international situations. His theological naiveté has, in many circles, operated as a negative factor and is the reason his message has been consistently unacceptable and indigestible to educated people (e.g., his notion of the second coming as a cure-all for the human quagmire). Yet no one can gainsay the significance of the huge assemblies at the Graham crusades, especially in cities as secular as New York and London, although one must realize that a large proportion of attendees was guaranteed, sometimes a year in advance, through the consummate organization and planning of the officers of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. On more than one occasion, God's blessing was called in once the machine had been swept into action.

Incidentally, a few blips occur upon Martin's screen which, though not damaging

to the overall quality of this excellent work, it should be mentioned: Graham was not the first American to preach before British royalty. Phillips Brooks preached before Queen Victoria. Edward L. R. Elson of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington baptized President Eisenhower. References to Princeton Theological Seminary are surprisingly ill informed (e.g., "after the loss of Princeton to the Modernists" [p. 79] and "when Princeton moved into the liberal camp" [p. 211]).

So much for some soft spots. There is still Graham the person. After fifty years of the most exhaustive and involved Christian witness ever seen before the world, with no ecclesiastical organization, no theological system, and no liturgical orientation, he continues to be "an authentic American hero" (p. 594). He operates intuitively (p. 562) yet his colleagues have stood faithfully with him through decades of the hurly-burly of continuous crusades and forays over the whole map. In all these, their loyalty to their leader has been exemplary. In "more than forty years in his public ministry, Billy Graham had few, if any, peers as a Christian leader" (p. 574). That leadership is acknowledged and deserved for a number of reasons, but most of all for the word Graham himself has chosen: integrity. A critic saw an atheist going in to hear Moody preach and taunted him, saying, "Why do you go to hear him? You don't believe what he says!" And the atheist shot back, "But *he* does!" Whatever may be said about the complexion of the great crowds (the largest in human history) or Graham's simplistic rendering of the Christian gospel, yet before the world of secularism, moral malaise, political intrigue, personal dishonesty, and faithlessness, the reality and witness of the Graham phenomenon cannot help holding up with strength the hands of the Christian faith.

Donald Macleod
Princeton Theological Seminary

Carroll, Jackson W. *As One with Authority: Reflective Leadership in Ministry*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. Pp. 234. \$14.95.

A few books on the nature of a pastor's leadership cut new inroads into the frontier of ministry in contemporary society and propose new ways of proceeding. Many monographs survey familiar territories and call for the repaving of those older ways already laid down. Jackson Carroll's most recent book is of the latter genre.

In this work, Carroll, a professor of religion and society at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, seeks to assay the current scholarly discussion about the authority of clergy in contemporary American congregations. He assumes ecclesial authority to be inherent primarily in the clergy and contends that such authority is increasingly ill defined. Carroll contextually locates the clergy's authority within broader authority structures and habits of American institutions. He then argues that pastoral authority and leadership are linked in a symbiotic relationship. "Authority," he claims early on, "is the right to exercise leadership in a particular group

or institution based upon a combination of qualities, characteristics or expertise" (p. 14). That proposition undergirds the central argument and utility of the book: as clergy leadership wisdom and skills are enhanced, so is clerical authority. The opposite is equally true: inept leadership produces anemic authority.

While this definition may be too confining for some and too implicitly hierarchical for many, few will differ with Carroll's contention that the authority of the clergy is in a deep crisis. Too many pastors' leadership skills, he insists, are frayed, fragile, and misguided. Particularly delicate is his discussion of clerical authority which is, presumably, rooted in the clergy's role of "representing the Sacred" (pp. 45ff.). It is not clear to this reviewer how Carroll can escape the implication that the clergy's "special relation to God" (his term) generates a qualitative difference between clergy and laity. Nevertheless, in chapter three, entitled the "Relational Dimension of Authority," he is faithful to his original definition: clergy authority must be earned. It cannot be conferred merely by appointment to the office. Rather, authority emerges from skillful persons. Such a position, however, exacerbates the precarious and confusing status of contemporary clerical authority.

In the middle chapters Carroll addresses the constructive task of providing a foundation for clerical authority in contemporary mainline Protestant churches. To this reader these pages are the most insightful and creative. Carroll does not start down the slippery slope by denying leadership roles to clergy. Rather, he outlines in chapter five the central task of leadership in the church, which, he claims, is to ensure Christian identity and vision in the community. Carroll's most creative insights occur in his effort to provide a "meta-method" for pastoral leadership. Drawing liberally upon the research of Donald A. Schön (particularly, *The Reflective Practitioner* [New York: Basic, 1984] and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990]), Carroll argues that clergy's authority derives from the combination of specialized knowledge *and* the ability to employ such knowledge imaginatively in the practice of ministry. This art/skill he calls "reflective leadership." One might call his argument a hermeneutic of practice, an exercise of "wisdom." "To lead reflectively entails . . . the capacity to 'read' situations, and, in the midst of them, draw on resources of knowledge, experience, and skills—often by inventing new ones—to construct faithful and appropriate responses. . . . Clergy who function with authority—not top down, asymmetrical fashion but in partnership with laity" (p. 122).

Carroll, in the last third of the book, outlines how the deeper structures of this "reflective leadership" engage with the tasks and roles of the contemporary pastorate. In the end, however, Carroll returns to a classical notion of clergy: authority follows creative leadership expertise *and* faithful representation of the sacred.

Finally, one insight charmed this reviewer. In this postmodern era of competitive epistemologies and social constructions of reality, Carroll offers a clarifying metaphor:

For a simple way of summarizing the spectrum from objectivist to constructionist [assumptions about reality], recall three baseball umpires. . . . The first, clearly representative of the objectivist position, calls them "as they are." The second, is a moderate constructionist or perspectivalist: "I call them as I see them." But for the third, the radical constructionist, "they ain't nothing till I call them" (p. 149).

Carroll's paths are not new. But when implemented in the contemporary pastorate, they should make for smoother travel.

John W. Stewart
Princeton Theological Seminary

Old, Hughes Oliphant. *Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology: Some Thoughts on the Theology of Worship*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992. Pp. xi + 147. \$10.95.

Old's preface introduces his audience: "serious theological students whose primary aim [is] to go out into the pastorate and lead the people of God in Christian worship" (p. ix). With occasional exceptions, the language is readily accessible and the text free of daunting liturgical jargon—a considerable virtue!

Chapter one discusses "doxology as the theology of worship." Old's primary focus is Sunday morning; he explains his use of the term doxology by saying that it "commends itself because it presses us to go beyond mere cultic acts and rituals and to see all these things in terms of the serving of God's glory" (p. 2). This introduction orients the reader to the purpose of worship and the authority/ies and sources for Protestant worship. Worship is "service to God," based "in God's calling us to live to the praise of his glory." We are to worship according to "the revelation of God's will" which "is found all the way through Scripture" (pp. 7-9). Protestants do not disregard the liturgical tradition, and the Protestant reformers were strongly influenced by the early church, but liturgical tradition is clearly subordinated to Scripture. In Old's view, the Puritans were the source of much of what is best in Protestant worship (p. 14), but he also recognizes other historical contributors. Old regards hymnbooks and sermons as the key sources for Protestant liturgy, and these, along with Scripture and patristic writings, are his basic materials.

Chapters two through six treat the major themes of worship: (2) epicletic doxology, the worship of invoking, calling on God; (3) kerygmatic doxology, worship as proclamation; (4) wisdom doxology, the relationship of wisdom theology to worship; (5) prophetic doxology, based on the conviction that "the holiness of God demands the holiness of his people" (p. 91); and (6) covenantal doxology, emphasizing the worship of God by "the assembly of God's people . . . united in sacred bond" to give thanks, confess covenant obligations, and witness to God's faithfulness (p. 111). In each chapter, after explaining what he means by the theme, Old develops a theological history, grounding the discussion in biblical texts, then moving swiftly

through the ages, giving particular attention to Protestant worship. The chapter on wisdom doxology is perhaps the most intriguing because the relationship of wisdom theology to worship is the most novel. The many quotations, including African-American spirituals and hymns by women, give liveliness and color. Some medieval illustrations are used, but later Roman Catholicism is not.

Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology is appropriately but somewhat ambiguously named. Without explicitly saying so, Old's concern is Protestant worship, in part because he wishes to balance contemporary Roman Catholic writings such as Aiden Kavanagh's *On Liturgical Theology*. Old is consciously aligning himself with Geoffrey Wainwright's understanding of doxology, which clearly relates Christian worship, Christian thought, and Christian action (see pp. 1-2, 13). The appropriateness of the title is in the reference to "themes and variations," a clue to the fact that Old is not defining a single right structure of worship. The ambiguity is the result of leaving the reader to infer the scholarly arguments over the meaning of "doxology" and "liturgical theology" that are implicit in the background of the exposition. An extended discussion of academic terminology would be out of place in a work intended to teach active leaders of worship something about Protestant (read "Reformed") worship, but some general outline of the different uses of words would have been helpful. Another source of ambiguity is the fact that Old moves from Sunday morning to a broader scope of worship (e.g., the Puritans' attention to "the life of prayer and . . . discipline of daily worship in the family" [pp. 14-15]), without explicitly defining worship or liturgy. Perhaps such definitions are not necessary, given the inductive way the reader is led through the themes, but lack of definition has the effect of obscuring the dimensions of Protestant worship; not all evidence for Protestant worship, for example, is to be found in hymnbooks and sermons, the sources to which Old appeals.

Quibbling aside, Old's book is most welcome, timely, and interesting reading, and should find a ready reception among Protestants of Reformed and free church backgrounds. We are again in debt to this prolific scholar and dedicated churchman.

Elsie McKee

Princeton Theological Seminary

Duck, Ruth C. *Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991. Pp. x + 220. \$16.95.

The centerpiece of this study is its concluding proposal for a new formula for Christian baptism, a threefold interrogative formula using the triad "fountain," "offspring," and "wellspring." Leading up to this proposal is a lovely and accessible discussion of the problem that baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit poses for contemporary believers. Ruth C. Duck, professor of worship at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, is ordained in the

United Church of Christ. Both academic precision and ministerial sensitivity come into play in this helpful study.

Duck adopts the perspective of scholars such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her assertion that the original community that formed around Jesus of Nazareth was uncommonly egalitarian, a vision that quickly became obscured by the patriarchal social structures of institutionalized Christianity. Patriarchy, Duck asserts again and again, "is not consistent with structures of Christian community instituted by Jesus Christ" and should not be the primary metaphor at the moment in which the baptized take on new life in Christ (p. 4).

Early chapters focus critically on the use of the metaphor Father for God, using arguments from social science and biblical criticism and employing feminist methods for reconsideration of God-talk. Duck gives particular emphasis to the issue of the abuse of children in her rejection of parental language, especially the use of "Father." In her summary of the debate over the significance of Jesus' use of "Abba," she gives added insight by noting the sharp increase in "Father" language in the last two decades. In her response to this patriarchal imagery (and its concomitant abuse of power), Duck outlines the four methods that will guide her development of a new baptismal formula. These methods (the hermeneutic of suspicion, the method of remembrance, the translation method of dynamic equivalence, and creative ritualization) are all active in Duck's later chapters. Duck argues strongly that recent steps toward Christian unity, particularly the World Council of Churches' *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982), have been too willing to ignore the issue of patriarchal language in the name of unity.

The final chapters will provoke the most discussion. Duck insists that Christians are baptized into the name of the triune God, not simply into the name of Jesus. She views this triunity as a divine society of equality and mutual interrelationship. The charge to be answered by such a model is that it too readily employs God's plurality for the cause of social engineering, and that it makes God's unity into a merely formal concept. Her chapter on "Alternatives," however, contains the most complete discussion of the formula "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer" that I have seen. While she faults this language for failing to clarify the relationship between Christ and God, she, unlike other respondents to this alternative, is not concerned about the argument that such conceptual language is impersonal (her own evocative water imagery is open to the same charge). Yet, while I agree with her criticism of the use of parental imagery for the divine, it is hard to name another image, with its overtones of "home," that grounds so deeply who we are and whence we are bound. A different ecological sensibility might lend urgency to nature imagery, and certainly baptism is an appropriate moment for reflection on the symbol of water. But such imagery does not adequately evoke current Christian sensibilities and requires further theological reflection.

Written with an eye for pastoral application, this study provides a valuable resource for those who struggle to name God. Along the way, it also serves as a

thoughtful reflection on Christian baptism, enlivened in many places with Duck's expertise in hymnody.

Nancy Ann Dallavalle
University of Notre Dame

Mitchell, Rosemary Catalano, and Gail Anderson Ricciuti. *Birthings and Blessings: Liberating Worship Services for the Inclusive Church*. New York: Crossroad, 1991. Pp. 191. \$12.95.

The book *Birthings and Blessings*, which grows out of particular worshiping communities, promises to be very useful to many others. The authors, graduates of Princeton Theological Seminary, are pastors of Downtown United Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York. They discovered a need for ministry to women who did not feel at home in traditional church women's groups or who had left the institutional church. In 1987, with the help of the congregation's United Presbyterian Women, they organized a new worship group focusing on women and led by women. This "Women, Word, and Song" gathering began with about twenty-five women, but soon included three times as many. Services, which take place about every eight weeks, are planned and led by a rotating group of women. Feminist in orientation, the group values shared leadership and openness to the Spirit; it seeks to honor each woman's experience and attend to the senses in worship. Eleven of the book's services as well as a retreat program have emerged from this ministry by and with women. Themes include "The Holy Emerges from the Darkness" and "Prophetic Voices." "A Women's Service of Penitence" seeks to correct the distortion of prayers of confession that address male experience more than female experience.

Twelve of the book's rituals grow out of an alternative Sunday morning celebration for both men and women without traditional sermon, choir, or space at Downtown Presbyterian Church. Among them are orders for Christmas, Lent, and Easter, and liturgies of baptism, anointing, and teacher dedication.

The services of *Birthings and Blessings* are Reformed in context; Scripture holds central place. Scriptural stories of women, interpreted with a feminist hermeneutic, hold key place.

These services are among the few feminist liturgies that I can imagine using with a local church group or small feminist worship group without much modification. Words are used gracefully and sparingly. The language is generally direct and accessible. Metaphors for God are varied, usually gender-neutral, sometimes feminine; "Lord" is used several times. Resources and readings come from an amazing breadth of liturgical, musical, and literary sources, from Presbyterian and World Council of Churches materials, to the feminist songs of Carole Etzler, to African-American spirituals to poems by Anne Sexton and Wendell Berry. The authors' own writing is clear and appropriate for common worship.

But words and printed orders do not dominate the worship services in this book. Each suggests activities or symbols to help worshipers correlate the Scripture with their experience. Worshipers descend into the "belly of the whale" when reflecting on Jonah; they relinquish their crowns while identifying with the courageous Queen Vashti. Plans are simple enough for most groups to reproduce. Although some of the liturgies include reflections by a leader, most also provide questions for discussion or opportunities for sharing related to the theme. The questions offered are carefully designed to facilitate discussion. Thus, worshipers are not so much addressed as called into an experience of the theme and Scripture. Songs support the various themes to provide unified worship. The structure varies as appropriate to particular services. These services engage the whole person.

Word, song, action, story, symbol, and contemporary experience are creatively blended to make these services useful either as orders of worship or as models for a group's planning. One drawback is that the standard copyright notice is attached; groups must seek permission to reprint materials in bulletins. Small groups could purchase multiple copies; larger groups could use the services that do not require bulletins, or draw on the book for ideas and readings.

At points, authors of hymns could have been identified more precisely; in at least three cases, readers may falsely suppose the adapter or editor of a hymn was its original author.

Birthings and Blessings makes a major contribution to inclusive and liberating worship by showing how, practically speaking, Christian worship can embody feminist principles. These resources, forged by sensitive and gifted authors on the anvil of actual worship experiences, have the mark of authenticity that commends them for general use.

Ruth C. Duck

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

Norén, Carol M. *The Woman in the Pulpit*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991. Pp. 175. \$12.95.

"The Sunday morning service is different when a woman preaches" (p. 9). With this opening assertion, Carol Norén, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Duke University Divinity School, launches a multifaceted examination of the ways in which the content and style of proclamation are shaped by the presence of a woman in the pulpit. Norén's own stated goals for her book are: (1) to equip women seminarians and clergy for "intentional, effective, and faithful communication of the gospel" (p. 11), and (2) to bring to consciousness and to evaluate critically the often unconscious gender-related expectations congregations have of their preachers.

Drawing upon her own live observation of the preaching of women clergy and seminarians (as opposed to relying solely upon printed sermons or videotapes), Norén deals with seven different areas of import for women as preachers: the call to

preach, role models for preaching, authority in the pulpit, verbal and nonverbal self-disclosure in proclamation, biblical interpretation, theological language, and liturgy. In each instance, her discussion is informed by the thought of feminist authors in other theological disciplines (church history, hermeneutics, theology, liturgy), as well as by her own appealing brand of "practical wisdom." At the conclusion of each chapter, Norén offers suggestions for how clergywomen can best utilize her findings in their own preaching ministries.

Among the most provocative assertions Norén makes about women and preaching are the following: Women tend to speak of their call to preach in terms of an ongoing process, rather than referring to some cataclysmic or life-changing event in their lives. Women tend to identify with "local" role models (women and men they know personally) rather than with famous preachers of national or international note. Many women testify that they are more comfortable exercising authority through preaching or celebration of the sacraments than they are in other ministry tasks and settings. Women's body language in the pulpit draws the hearer into greater intimacy than does men's. Women tend to identify with the least powerful person in a biblical narrative, and to interpret the story from that perspective. Women select and develop metaphors more conservatively in preaching than in the liturgies they create.

While many of Norén's assertions will elicit an immediate nod of recognition from her female readers, others need further augmentation and research to be convincing. For example, how do issues such as race and class influence the selection of role models, the perceived understanding of authority, or the use of theological language *among* women preachers? Although Norén touches upon such issues, recent conversations among Euro-American feminist and African-American womanist theologians suggest that significant differences of perspective among women clergy may have been too readily glossed over in the name of gender-linked traits.

The other concern I would raise has to do with Norén's tone in regard to the very sensitive issue of self-disclosure in women's preaching. My own (altogether informal) observation of women clergy is that they tend to be more berated and frustrated by gender-linked expectations in this area than in any other. Women's voices, dress, mannerisms, facial expressions, and verbal self-disclosures in the pulpit frequently elicit all manner of unwarranted and demeaning comments by congregants and clergy who are accustomed to a male presence in the pulpit. My concern is that Norén—by sounding numerous warnings about what women clergy should *avoid* in this regard ("inviting congregational voyeurism [p. 71], participating in "emotional exhibitionism" [p. 72], adopting a "mother-toddler relationship with the congregation" [p. 73], interacting "with grown-up listeners as a daughter" [p. 82], or communicating "femininity, sexual immaturity, sentimentality, and fragility" [p. 79])—may unintentionally cause her women readers to become even more fearful and confused about how to "be themselves" in the pulpit.

On the whole, however, I find that Norén's work accomplishes its two stated

goals in an admirable fashion and with a very positive and affirming tone for women. Her book provides women clergy with a long-needed "safe space" in which they can wrestle honestly with what it means to preach the gospel as females. Both clergywomen and the broader church will benefit from the significant discussion Norén initiates.

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale
Union Theological Seminary in Virginia

Willimon, William H. *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992. Pp. xi + 124. \$10.95.

This book may further the conversation about the relationship between preaching and liturgy. William H. Willimon's homiletics springs from the ecclesiological concerns he shares with Stanley Hauerwas: the Christian community is generated and sustained apart from the culture in which it resides; the language of preaching is properly understood in the context of that community; and all notions that the tradition should be translated into the cultural idiom, that the church's first goal is the transformation of culture, or that there is a body of transcendent truth of which the gospel is one expression, must be put aside. Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, because of insufficient attention to the particularity of the church, led us down the road, ironically, to accommodation and reduction. The church, which is created in baptism, is a unique community and speaks a peculiar language. Its preaching is inevitably the speech of "collision," and to the ears of culture is—even beyond being offensive—incomprehensible.

For the preacher this means that the vast hermeneutical and homiletical effort spent on "translating" the gospel into the language of culture may have been misguided. Willimon would certainly say so if the premise on which that was based were the notion that the speech of the Christian household could be expressed more clearly in the coin of the Empire. On the contrary, he says, taking up the Christian way is like learning a foreign language, and this peculiar language is learned over a lifetime of repetitious speech and liturgical action. In this concern for speaking the language of this particular household, Willimon echoes current discussion in homiletics, and mirrors a growing uneasiness with the potential usurping of the community's distinctive story by well-intentioned efforts at imaginative and contemporary expression in narrative, image, and anecdote. The sermons in this book suggest that if preachers followed Willimon they would give a large place to the household's normative language, Holy Scripture, and would monitor carefully their use of contemporary and artistic material. The church needs, first and foremost, its own essential language, in liturgy and sermon.

The other side of this is that the preacher has a unique role in the life of the household. The sermon, as pastoral speech, has an obvious obligation to the tradition, but this speech may function optimally in the Sunday assembly only if it is

couched to a considerable degree in secular idiom. This may be done with greatest confidence in the context of liturgy that has the texture, color, and sound of the community's tradition. When that is the case, the preacher may more safely bring the alien culture into the community's sacred time and space. The late Edmund Steimle was able to speak of "the fabric of the sermon" as secular largely because he lived and preached out of the richness of the Lutheran liturgical tradition (see Edmund Steimle, Morris Niedenthal, and Charles Rice, *Preaching as Story* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991]). Willimon sets in a new context the ongoing question in homiletics: To what degree must the preacher rely on secular culture to communicate the gospel, not outside but within the community? The author of the most important book on preaching and the imagination in recent years is, by contrast, publishing this year a volume on the history of preaching (see Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1992]; his earlier book is *Imagination of the Heart* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1988]). This is the oscillation to which preachers, who need but do not quite trust speech other than the language of Zion, have become accustomed.

As Willimon is prone to do, he leaves us with a good many questions. Is the church formed voluntarily, as in adult baptism, or organically? What sort of "household" is this? The book leans toward voluntarism: one chooses a "life-style" and commits to it in baptism. This becomes decisive for preaching, especially for its tone. If I am preaching among the baptized, those who by virtue of what has been done for them belong already to God in Christ, are full members of the household, then I will preach in quite a different tone from that of the preacher trying to lead people to "commitment." The author implies that preaching precedes baptism, and despite his protests seems to turn away from infant baptism and the organic formation of the church of which it is a primary symbol.

What is most lacking is attention to the eucharistic setting of both baptism and the sermon (see my *The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991]). From the earliest days, initiation was into the eucharistic community, and the repeated action that "cultivated" the baptized was the regular anamnesis of Jesus Christ in the eucharist. This book, by omission, seems to lay this responsibility for faith's formation upon the preacher standing apart from the eucharist. And that leads us back toward the Christian life as a "style" of living, rather than as the regular participation in the proleptic, mysterious polis from which issue political action and holy living. It is the particular context of the eucharist that gives the preacher both the freedom and grounding needed, a place to keep one's feet while being available to the culture of which we are inevitably a part and to which we must speak.

On the second Sunday of Advent, I heard Dean Geralyn Wolf preach, to her congregation at Christ Church Cathedral in Louisville, a sermon I believe Willimon would applaud. Describing getting lost on a Kentucky freeway and having to go on the wrong road for some time before getting back on the right track, she spoke of

responding to the call of John the Baptist to repentance as getting clear where we are going and then relying on grace to get on the road and stay there. Then, at the heart of the sermon, she opened the prayer book to the vows taken at baptism: "Will you continue in the Apostles' teaching . . . in the breaking of bread . . . in resisting evil?" She simply led us back to our baptism and then to pray in the breaking of the bread for grace to continue in this way. That would seem to be, as Willimon implies, the proper place of preaching, among the peculiar people of God between baptism and holy table.

Charles L. Rice

Drew University Theological School

Allen, Ronald J. *Preaching the Topical Sermon*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. xi + 164. \$11.99.

Pity the poor topical sermon; it's been in something of a mess lately, and Ronald J. Allen has come to see if he can help straighten it out. A topical sermon is, of course, the opposite of an expository sermon, in the sense that it starts not with a biblical text but, rather, with some urgent theme or issue—the Gulf War, the crisis of divorce, the rise in AIDS, the hunger for forgiveness, the church's response to homosexuality, to name a few examples—and attempts to interpret this issue from the vantage point of the gospel as a whole.

Not too many decades ago, topical preaching was in its heyday in prominent pulpits. Erudite topical preachers spoke confidently and from a coherent Christian framework about all sorts of urgent concerns of the day, and daily newspapers were eager to publish Monday summaries of their Sunday wisdom. On the American scene, the preaching of Harry Emerson Fosdick, weekly addressing subjects ranging from personal doubt to the moral questions raised by World War II, was a notable expression of the topical style and was particularly influential in shaping a generation of preachers.

Then came the downfall. Topical preaching always had a wandering eye and flirted dangerously with the spirit of the age. Gradually this took its toll. First, there was the sad resignation to the seductions of the culture, then, the heavy drinking in the bars of positive thinking, and finally, the complete theological breakdown. Rapidly, vigorous and intelligent topical preaching of the Fosdick variety degenerated into the spouting of mawkish bromides—"Three Keys to Loving Yourself," "The Be-happy Attitudes," that sort of thing. Gradually, what was left of the biblical theology movement teamed up with the rising interest in the lectionary to bounce topical preaching out of respectability in the church and into the streets, where it has wandered homeless ever since, finding shelter only in the feel-good cathedrals of pop Christianity, theosophical debating societies, and an occasional Unitarian church.

Allen's book is an effort to rehabilitate topical preaching, and a good effort it is.

Associate Professor of Preaching at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Allen is the author of several widely respected volumes on preaching, and this book grew from his regularly offered course on topical preaching. As such, it has a seasoned, wise, and practical "kitchen-tested" feel.

Allen readily admits that topical preachers have been "theologically vacuous," but he attributes this to "malpractice" and not to any intrinsic defect in the topical approach. He maintains that there are many times—for example, when a crisis hits the community, or when the preacher wants to address an issue larger than is encompassed in a single biblical text, or when the lectionary serves up only toads—when topical preaching is to be preferred over expository. Not only that, Allen winks at the preacher-reader as if to say, "Look, no matter how committed we are to expository preaching, we all do topical preaching from time to time. Let's admit it and learn to do it in a responsible, theologically mature way."

The heart of this book is an eighteen-step method for preparing a topical sermon, which calls on the preacher to trace the topic in question through church history, to examine its treatment in the work of at least two theologians, and to create an inventory of the congregation's views on the issue, among other things. The method seems comprehensive, solid, and full of promise, but also absolutely interminable. Aware of this, Allen reassures us that some of his former students continue to use the method in their congregational preaching and that "it goes much faster than they expect."

Helpfully, Allen includes five quite effective topical sermons, each by a different preacher and in a different style. Also adding to the value of the book is a chapter called "Strategies for Preaching on Controversial Topics," which is full of sound counsel and is one of the most practical and level-headed statements on this in print.

Ronald Allen has once again put us in his debt by producing another finely crafted, clearly written, thoroughly useful book on preaching. There is, however, one aspect of Allen's treatment that leaves me nervous. By his definition, topical preaching frees itself from the constraints of particular biblical texts in favor of "the gospel itself." But what is the gospel itself? Allen assumes that we know, of course, but do we? Even if one is not a card-carrying postmodernist, doesn't a unified phrase like "the gospel itself" need and deserve some struggle? Back in the halcyon days of topical preaching, it was not uncommon to think of the Christian gospel as an abstracted system, something like a Christian philosophy, which transcended particularities of all kinds—textual, cultural, sectarian, ethnic, and so on. This "gospel itself" was on friendly terms with an equally abstracted and homogeneous culture, and together they could opine about all types of consequential topics.

The best topical preaching today, however, arises out of an awareness that there is a gospel, but that our access to it is always through very particular, and often messy, circumstances. This truth of particularity is one that responsible biblical preachers never forget; they crash into it week after week in the form of tangled, nonabstract texts. A preacher does not have to do textual biblical preaching to know

this truth, but topical preachers, liberated from the wonderful and generative misery of exegesis, are particularly prone to forget it. When they do, topical preachers can easily become intoxicated once more by the culture, mistaking it for "the gospel itself." Now that most of the biblical theologians are either dead or aging, someone else will have to drag such preachers out of the Zeitgeist Bar.

Thomas G. Long
Princeton Theological Seminary

Ward, Richard. *Speaking from the Heart: Preaching with Passion*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. Pp. 139. \$10.95.

Richard F. Ward, Assistant Professor of Speech at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, has written an insightful, helpful homiletics text in which the act of preaching is treated as performance. Ward does not define performance as artifice, however, but as "form coming through." The sermon as performance is the shape the Word takes as it comes to expression through the experience of the preacher for an audience or congregation in a specific setting. Simply put, in preaching, the Word takes the form of human speech. Consequently, speakers themselves are important. Their sensory experiences count for something. Their voices and bodies, together with the varied responses of the congregation, become a locus for the vent of God's self-disclosure. As Ward puts it, "The preacher's 'food' comes from his or her reasoned and imaginative engagement with Scripture, tradition, and the wisdom of the community. Yet the place where the feast is prepared is within the preacher's experience" (p. 34). That experience, therefore, should not be demeaned or ignored. Instead, it should be valued and appropriated for the sake of the Word. It is Ward's conviction that passionate preaching, preaching that seems truly to matter to people, preaching that has something at stake in it, comes from deep within, from the heart. It is not speech with the *you* withdrawn. In Ward's own words: "Preachers who stand outside of what they are saying will speak with detachment, artificiality or disassociation. Ironically, this incongruity between speaker and speech is what the listener often refers to pejoratively as 'performance'" (p. 85).

Ward is clear that the preacher's story, or relived personal experience, is not in service to itself. Instead, it is used to read, speak, and make manifest the otherness of the scriptural witness, and the otherness of the stories of those who are listening as the Scriptures are read and as the Word is preached. Listeners are not adversaries to be won over, but friends and colleagues in the making of meaning. Consequently, listeners are to be treated with respect. They are to be trusted. This reminder to trust others—and the Wholly Other—so that preaching, even though it clearly is an awful challenge, may be undertaken with joy instead of dread is expressed with particular eloquence and conviction by Ward. Ward's concern is to empower those who preach. He does not seek to fill them with anxiety. Ward does not stress *tech-*

nical competence. On the contrary, while not condoning technical incompetence, he keeps the focus on *personal* competence. Preachers must develop a strong, realistic self-perception, he asserts, for listeners appreciate preachers who take charge of the situation and define the listening experience (p. 55). Collaboration in the making of meaning in response to the divine self-disclosure, that is to say, does not take place in a context of formlessness. Rather, it takes place in the context of aesthetic speech where form, defining shape, comes through.

Drawing upon his dissertation concerning Paul and his "super apostle" adversaries at Corinth, Ward writes an outstanding chapter on the subject of "Listening to the Biblical Text" (pp. 89-107). In the course of doing so, he explains how the conventions of performance in a media culture, critically understood, can help to establish relevant norms for the speaking of the Scriptures in worship, not just as an exercise undertaken in anticipation of the sermon, but as the formative mode of proclamation of God's Word. Ward's theoretical exposition and his guidance concerning practice are informed by scholarly contributions from theology, biblical studies, rhetoric, performance studies, and cultural linguistics. To say that Ward handles all this material deftly and with a grasp of its relevance for understanding the nature of proclamation and the office of preaching is to understate the case. He presents complex ideas clearly and compellingly. His research is "up-to-the-minute," yet steeped in a knowledge of the communication theories of the past. As a result, he is able to help preachers understand their work and do it with "energy, intelligence, imagination and love." Reverend Penelope Duckworth hit the mark with her endorsement of Ward's manuscript. She said: "It would be hard not to preach a better sermon after reading this book." The present reviewer might add that it also would be hard not to read the Scriptures more responsibly and meaningfully.

Charles L. Bartow
Princeton Theological Seminary

Smith, Christine M. *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. 224. \$14.99.

Christine Smith, who is Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, is a familiar name to students of feminist theology in North America. Her first book, *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) was primarily a reflection of her feminist commitments. This new work, for which a summer spent in Guatemala was the catalyst, addresses a broad range of "radical evils" in our culture: handicappism, ageism, heterosexism, white racism, and classism, as well as sexism.

Her introductory chapter, "Preaching as a Theological Act," provides the framework for the rest of the book. Smith begins by stating that in preaching, at least

three worlds converge: the world of the text, the world of the preacher and community where proclamation occurs, and the larger social context. The third of these "worlds" is her primary interest, and operating from this frame of reference, the preacher's task is to disclose and articulate truth about all of contemporary human existence rather than merely parochial concerns. Because preaching ought to touch the deepest feelings and passions in a world of human suffering, she likens it to "weeping." The "confession" element is not praying for forgiveness and receiving God's grace, but rather truth telling (not explicitly biblical/theological) that begets hope in the Christian community. "Resistance," in Smith's framework, is encouraging the community to "be about God's redemptive activity in the world in concrete, particular ways." The listeners in the pews thus take part in the ongoing work of preaching, as they take a stand against various forms of evil within and around them. Each chapter that follows focuses on one of the "radical evils" listed earlier. After autobiographical narratives that identify the genesis of Smith's own "weeping," she offers essays explicating the nature of the evil in question, and raises theological issues that intersect with preaching and Christian community. The book also includes four of Smith's sermons manifesting the stages of weeping, confession, and resistance.

Smith is a gifted storyteller who includes poetry by Adrienne Rich, Alice Walker, and other women to illustrate poignantly the issues being presented. Her essays on various radical evils will be a valuable resource for ministers who choose to preach topical sermons or lead seminars on the subjects. Smith's diagnostic skill is impressive and well documented. What is lacking in much of the book is a reintegration of the "three worlds" depicted in the introduction, notably the world of the text. In the chapter on sexism, Smith writes, "it is essential for religious communities to look critically at the myths they hold about woman battering, and for preachers to ask ourselves why denial is so thoroughly rationalized in our cultures. . . . The Christian church continues to uphold and defend the institutions of family and marriage at the expense of women." Smith's assessment may be correct, but her prescription would be more convincing to much of the church if she identified biblical imperatives for the Christian community on the subject. In a similar way, the chapter on heterosexism contains the statement: "I do not see homosexuality as the problem that needs to be addressed. In contrast, I see the church's condemnation of lesbians and gay men as the major pastoral and theological problem." She calls preachers to proclaim grace in the face of heterosexist condemnation, but this grace or "sacred acceptance" is not identified with anything in Scripture. There will be many preachers living at the intersection of Smith's "three worlds" who, because of the text's claims upon them, cannot in good faith choose *between* homosexuality and heterosexism as the problem.

Related to the absence of reintegration of the three worlds is ambiguity about the will and sovereignty of God and the nature and work of the Trinity. Traditional theological categories such as resurrection, conversion, atonement, and sin are re-

defined in ways that focus on human interaction and minimize or ignore the dynamics of the divine-human relationship. Smith's Good Friday sermon, for example, examines contemporary crucifixions/oppression as something we must ultimately stop, so that we may become bearers of life. The peculiar significance of Jesus' crucifixion, to which the Scriptures bear witness, is not acknowledged.

In a culture where lectionary preaching has become increasingly common, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance* is a timely challenge to address Christian communities' complacent participation in larger societal evils. It is likely to prove more valuable as a sourcebook than a homiletical method.

Carol M. Norén
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Van Harn, Roger E. *Pew Rights: For People Who Listen to Sermons*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992. Pp. xiv + 162. \$14.95.

Roger E. Van Harn, pastor of the Grace Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, not only lives in a stronghold of the Reformed community, he is himself solidly rooted in that theological tradition. His clear vision of the preaching task of the contemporary church is born not only of his creative "from the pew" perspective, but also of his confidence and grounding in the Reformed tradition.

Some years ago, Fred Craddock took preachers around a homiletical corner with his call to take the listener along to the study and on the journey of sermon preparation. Van Harn asks preachers to go further with the listener, out into the pew, there to discover what the hearer has, as a theological matter, the right to experience. If Craddock urged preachers to take seriously the overhearing of the gospel, Van Harn calls preachers to understand the centrality of hearing as an act that must shape preaching decisively. The understanding of "pew rights" will empower preachers anew to act responsibly and responsively in a pulpit understood in its faith-community context. Although Van Harn says the book is intended to offer "people who listen to sermons some guidance about what they have a right to expect" (p. xii), it will probably and rightly have more impact on the audience of preachers who will find their work shaped by the hearers' role in the act of proclamation.

Apostolically correct, Van Harn's rights of pew people are twelve: to sit at the center of the church's mission; to hear a pioneer listener speak; to hear a word addressed to our deepest needs; to see the story behind the text; to hear the story around the text; to hear the message of the text speak; to see what's happening in light of God's story; to see our culture in light of God's story; to see our church in light of God's story; to hear the Word of God; to hear the faith of the church proclaimed from the church, to the church, for the world; and to be listened to before and after the sermons are spoken. These are expanded upon in a style and structure that are themselves homiletically strong. He writes like the good preacher

he most assuredly is. And while it is clear Van Harn is conversant with contemporary issues in hermeneutics, his writing is blessedly free from jargon. Clear links to Scripture, to Reformed theology, and to contemporary life as well as a pleasant use of repetition and illustration make the book approachable and usable. His drawing upon Bonhoeffer's wonderful, though not-often-used, lectures on preaching is effective and appreciated.

Van Harn has a good grasp of much recent homiletical literature, although his main resources are somewhat narrow in scope and do not include recent feminist or minority viewpoints. This lack of attention to the plurality of voices in homiletics today is reflected in a certain weakness in his approach to the problem of preaching in a pluralistic age. He knows there are a variety of hearers, but does not go far enough in helping preachers see how to nuance his clear vision in order to reach them. At one point, he says, "Whether the worshipers are veteran believers or cautious newcomers, worship is a time and place in which we practice what we believe together" (p. 135), lumping, it seems, the baptized and unbaptized together. But do these two groups indeed have the same expectations and rights? Van Harn helps preachers a good deal in their being faithful to the converted and committed, but one longs for him to speak as clear and helpful a word as the pulpit seeks to reach those new to the pew, who come from an increasingly pluralistic and secular culture.

Towards the end of the book, Van Harn asks, "What can a preacher do as a handmaiden through whom the Word of God can be born in a sermon?" (p. 132). Readable, Reformed, and refreshing, his book is a most helpful answer.

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Three Rivers, MI

Moore, Mary Elizabeth Mullino. *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. Pp. xiii + 232. \$16.95.

Viewing *Teaching from the Heart* as a professor of Christian education with concern for the educational ministry of the church, I am excited by three key contributions that Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore makes. First, reflecting the dual allegiances of this Professor of Theology and Christian Education at the School of Theology at Claremont, this book is an example of how theology and education can interact to illumine one another—it is practical theology. While Moore works from the tradition of process theology, the methodology by which she relates theology and educational method can be helpful for others who wish to engage in a theology-education dialogue from their own tradition. So often Christian education theory favors one partner in the dialogue to the neglect of the other; Moore creates a *mutual* conversation between theology and educational method by pointing to ways in which each conversation partner affirms, challenges, and builds on or modifies the

other. To be sure, Moore's commitment to process thought determines her selection of methods and thus takes priority in her methodology; however, she allows the methods and the life experiences that emerge from their employment to engage and challenge her theology in sometimes trenchant ways. In fact, it is in the ebb and flow of critique and emendation that Moore's process theology comes alive.

Second, Moore offers in-depth explorations of systematic approaches to education that can energize and guide our practice. She examines case study, gestalt, phenomenological, narrative, and conscientization methods—holistic methods that all aim to understand the unity, particularity, and depth of reality. The case study approach involves reflection on a particular, concrete situation of experience. The gestalt approach entails presenting many ideas and experiences and organizing the parts into unified patterns. Phenomenological methods are those in which persons reach into themselves and others to draw forth meaning. Narrative methods recognize the power of story to bear and critique culture and to incite the imagination toward renewal. Through conscientizing methods people name oppressions and re-form social reality.

Though Moore's emphasis is on analysis of method rather than description of specific techniques for employing these methods, she does offer some concrete guidance for the use of these methods. The practically oriented reader may get impatient with the analysis and yearn for more specifics. Even those who value the theoretical discussion may wish for more narrative accounts of how these methods have been used and might be used in such diverse settings as seminary classrooms, church ministries, and public education. In aspiring to speak generally to a variety of settings, the author unfortunately limits her offerings of such accounts. Nevertheless, her clear analyses stimulate the imagination and leave the reader percolating with ideas.

Finally, the author inspires a passion for education that enables us to balance what Whitehead referred to as "duty" and "reverence." We are filled with an awesome sense of duty as we recognize the humanizing and liberating power of education; but we are also filled with a reverence for God, one another, and the entire creation that tempers duty and keeps it from becoming an overzealous attempt to control.

As a person speaking from and to the Reformed tradition, I do not always agree with the assumptions of process theology. However, I find that, even though beginning from different theological starting points, I come to many of the same places that Moore does. Our traditions share a common concern for openness to reform and renewal and a common vocation to identify and respond to the current call of God's creative Spirit. This book can help us to become more faithful Reformed teachers.

Like the realities the author describes, this book is "extraordinarily ordinary." Moore probes to the "heart" of some very ordinary educational methods that we teachers and pastors all use in one form or another—usually rather haphazardly

(and without the esoteric nomenclature). But she does so in a way that helps us to think through the process more carefully and to see things that we might ordinarily miss. Furthermore, her extraordinary passion, honesty, and gentle anger move us to reach into the depths of our own heart and find that which is extraordinary about ourselves.

Carol Lakey Hess
Princeton Theological Seminary

Sinclair, Donna, and Yvonne Stewart. *Christian Parenting: Raising Children in the Real World*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. 134. \$11.95.

Donna Sinclair and Yvonne Stewart write from their own experience as mothers and as women who care about children, all children. Sinclair edits "Kidpower," a regular section in *The United Church Observer* (United Church of Canada). Stewart has been a national staff consultant on children's work and leadership development for the United Church of Canada. Between them they have five children. That they are Canadian should worry you not a whit, for their real world is very much the real world in the United States too. They write, not because they claim any expertise. (Indeed they disclaim any, as most parents would.) Rather they write because they feel compelled to fill a gap they have found in the parenting books, especially books on Christian parenting, that flood the bookstore shelves.

The premise on which they write so engagingly is: "We believe very strongly that the way parents raise children is inextricably bound up with their theology" and particularly their view of God. The authors view God as "a loving co-creator" (p. 6). Hence the chapters that follow, each written by one of the women, are drawn out of a theology that centers on this image of God, rather than God as a "stern judge." (For a fuller development of the connection between theology and parenting, see *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* by Philip Greven [Alfred A. Knopf, 1991].)

As one reads each chapter, there is little doubt that the women have known sorrow as well as joy in their parenting. They tackle the hard questions, although single answers are not what they offer. Still, the questions they raise, both in the chapter and in the discussion guide at the end of the book, could make for a fruitful discussion with any parent or group of parents.

The six chapters that form the meat of the book are divided between the authors. One is never left pondering who wrote what. They cover major concerns of parents in our churches today: Christian stewardship in "Money, Designer Jeans, and Presents," self-esteem in "Competition, Getting Ahead, or Going Together," sex and sexism in "Sexuality, Self-Esteem, and the Song of Songs," confrontation and peace-making in "Conflict, Courage, and Self-Defense," big and little life changes in "Crises, Support, and Renewal," and being Christian in a secular world in "Being Different, Being Accepted, and Being Faithful."

As they relate each topic to their faith and the Bible, they remind us again and again that the faith community is and should be an important support for every parent and each family. And finally, they remind us that we raise our children to make their own free choices, trusting that God will be with them and us, no matter what.

The audience for this book is clear. The audience is not educators, not pastors, not theologians, not physicians, not engineers, not secretaries—unless these persons are parents. They are talking to parents, and urging parents to talk with one another as persons of faith. To help that to happen, at least six provocative questions are included in an appendix. I say, get this book to the parents in your congregation and bring them together to talk about it!

Carol A. Wehrheim
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Culbertson, Philip. *New Adam: The Future of Male Spirituality*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Pp. 175. \$10.95.

If you are a male searching for guideposts along the way of manhood, but you find the "wild man" approach too primitive, then you may want to consider Philip Culbertson's rendering of the "New Adam." Suspicious that Robert Bly's "Iron John" is more a product of gynophobia than a vision of a deep masculinity, Culbertson describes instead a masculine spirituality that seeks a more sensitive self-understanding in light of feminist criticism.

Culbertson is calling for nothing less than a conversion. Most American males, he says, are entrapped by the principles of logical thinking, parallel structures, and evenhanded intellectualism; we are lonely—going through life without friends; we do not nurture, we dominate; we fear intimacy, fear women, fear men because we fear homosexuality, fear eros, fear feelings altogether. "The four marks of the traditional American male," he summarizes, are "penis pride, rugged self-sacrificing independence, professional success and status, and a mixture of sexual activity with women and a frequently pathological homophobia." The book spells out, in other words, the total depravity of man in detail, and several biblical "texts of terror" for men are explored to this end.

However, there is the hope, Culbertson encourages, that within the community of sensitive men, we might find the support, friendship, and love necessary in the struggle towards a gentler, softer masculinity—one that treasures interrelationality and mutuality of loving care. He tells of his own experience in a men's support and prayer group, along with the joys and disappointments of it, suggesting that other men might want to form their own group. Prayer is crucial to this new masculine spirituality, to be approached in community and spontaneity, and with an open heart rather than power-hungry demands.

As an alternative to the Iron John (Hans) fairy tale, Culbertson presents another

of Grimms' tales, "White Snake," as a model for sensitive men. "The white snake symbolizes the flaccid adult penis (flaccidity being the normal male condition) as opposed to the erect phallus." When the main character of the story, a young servant man, "has come to terms with his relaxed and natural masculine identity as a spiritual person, he finds that he has been given a mature wisdom, which in turn empowers him to encounter and engage the powerful mysteries of creation."

Despite the book's promising subtitle, *The Future of Male Spirituality* (a terribly large claim), it can probably be more appreciated as social criticism. Even with the descriptions of "New Adam," "White Snake," prayer, and the support group, I believe the reader will find the book clear on sin and fuzzy on grace. I worry that the descriptions of "most American males" come close to insensitive stereotyping that kills off the infinite variety of experiences known to men. (I worry about this with Bly as well.) On the other hand, the impressive thing about Culbertson's criticism is that it is by a man, about men, and such self-criticism is hardly easy.

In the end, as men sort out these various voices crying in the wilderness, we might do well not to pit the "wild man" against the "New Adam" or define ourselves by one paradigmatic tale, whether "Iron John" or "White Snake." Echoing Ecclesiastes, perhaps there is a time to be relaxed and a time to be wild, a time for our families and a time for work, a time for community and a time to be alone. Grace, then, would help us know that through the various rhythms and multiple dimensions of our lives—that shoot through all of this—there could be something of the sacred.

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Taylor, Charles W. *The Skilled Pastor: Counseling as the Practice of Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. Pp. 144. \$9.95.

Charles W. Taylor, Professor of Pastoral Theology at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, is serious about helping the pastor become more skilled in pastoral counseling. He writes as a pastor of the church to pastors, lay and ordained, who want to take their theological heritage seriously. He even gets us back to the practice of calling people who are receiving pastoral care parishioners instead of calling them by some clinical term like clients, patients, or counselees.

Taylor develops what he calls a metanoia model of pastoral counseling. *Metanoia* means "to change one's mind or attitude," which is descriptive of Taylor's basic concern. He is indebted to Albert Ellis' rational-emotive therapy and believes that faulty or irrational beliefs lie at the bottom of people's negative feelings and behaviors. The task in counseling, then, is to change a person's irrational beliefs and to help him or her see the situation from a more realistic and hopeful perspective. For Taylor, this means helping parishioners see the good news of God's presence and power in their lives.

Taylor maintains that there are three stages in the skilled pastor's work: Explor-

ing the parishioners' situation, understanding what can be done about it, and helping to develop and implement a plan of action. The author describes each stage in minute and systematic detail, leaving no stone unturned in his attempt to help inexperienced pastors fulfill their pastoral duty. Each stage requires special skills: Stage one requires presence, stage two proclamation, and stage three guidance. Taylor uses verbatim reports and case studies to enliven his description, and at the end of each chapter he suggests workable exercises to help the pastor learn the needed skills. When the skill may be difficult to master, Taylor provides a word of encouragement.

Proclamation is a key ingredient in Taylor's metanoia model. I was especially interested in his discussion of the topic, because proclamation does not seem to fit easily into the counseling process. For Taylor, proclamation is predicated on theological assessment, that is, on the ability to think theologically and to evaluate the adequacy of the parishioner's underlying beliefs. Taylor's theological assessment focuses on three types of human experience—guilt, anxiety, and anger. He elaborates negative and positive responses to each of these experiences. Generally a negative response is some form of self-centered demand or expectation, while a positive response is an implicit or explicit acknowledgment of the presence of God's love and mercy in our lives. The move from self-concern to faith in God is not a simple possibility. Taylor describes an extended process called proclamation in which the pastor may have to use the skills of informing, sharing, confronting, contending, and reviewing. He clarifies what is involved in each skill and offers helpful exercises to master it.

Taylor believes that the metanoia model is appropriate for short-term counseling (one to six sessions) and for the nonspecialist pastor. He is right on both counts, and because he never loses sight of these parameters his book is a real contribution to pastoral counseling. This does not mean that the unskilled pastor will not feel at times like the centipede who suddenly becomes aware of its many feet. Nor does it mean that the pastor will agree with everything that Taylor says, maybe least of all with his tendency to make counseling and proclamation primarily a managerial or problem-solving task. Nevertheless, the unskilled pastor will find Taylor a thorough and articulate teacher who has the heart of an understanding pastor. Under this guidance, the pastor can become more skilled in counseling and more aware of counseling as the practice of theology.

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Driskill, J. Lawrence. *Mission Adventures in Many Lands*. Pasadena: Hope Publishing House, 1992. Pp. 212. \$11.95.

Here is a fascinating book that is must reading for anyone interested in mission, church history, or stories of personal and church growth. Available in both paper-

back and hard cover, this volume contains fifty-three true stories of lives changed by the touch of the gospel. It is a marvelous source of illustrations for sermons and church school, and of information for people of all races and places.

Mission Adventures in Many Lands is an ideal textbook for the study of how global missions affect personal lives and transform communities. The possibilities for use in vacation church schools, camps, and conferences are limited only by one's imagination. Each story could be made into a drama, a puppet show, or an exercise in the study of peoples and cultures.

Useful especially for young people, some of these stories have been used by church school papers and magazines. But for a minister seeking vivid illustrations for sermons or for a series of children's sermonettes, these fifty-three stories taken from life are a vibrant source of materials, new and fresh.

The author, J. Lawrence Driskill, and his family were missionaries to Japan for twenty years. Active in the development of new congregations, he brings a deep faith and a world of experience to this book. He is currently serving with Japanese-American churches in the Los Angeles area. He has a gift for storytelling and sharing his faith with others.

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Buechner, Frederick. *The Clown in the Belfry: Writings on Faith and Fiction*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. Pp. 171. \$17.00.

At one point in this volume, there appears the famous Red Smith quote, "Writing is really quite simple; all you have to do is sit down at your typewriter and open a vein." This statement could well serve as a central part of Frederick Buechner's credo. Perhaps no modern writer has poured out more of his own life's blood and subjected more of his experience to theological analysis than has Buechner. In three previous volumes, *The Sacred Journey*, *Now and Then*, and *Telling Secrets*, he courageously held joyful and tragic moments in his life to the harsh light of public print. Buechner's goal was not mere self-revelation, but always a searching for epiphanies, a vigilant seeking of glimpses of God's grace amid the tangles of a human life honestly presented. Buechner has faith that somehow, somewhere, there is redemption in the literary shedding of blood.

Indeed, in this latest book, Buechner maintains that we need just the sort of writers "who show exceptional promise at looking at their own lives in this world as candidly and searchingly and feelingly and truly as they know how and then of telling the rest of us what they have found there most worth finding." He means, of course, to describe others, but he also unintentionally describes himself. This collection of six sermons and eight other occasional pieces (a "mishmash" he calls it) is not autobiographical in the strict generic sense, but in Buechner's writing the line is blurred between description and personal witness. These essays range over

many topics, including the trials of adolescence, the writing of Flannery O'Connor, the nature of the Bible, and the relationship between faith and fiction, but Buechner does not simply portray any of these subjects; he is, rather, *alive* to them, and he presents them all by recording the seismic waves they have produced in his own life.

"The clown in the belfry," which serves as both the title of the book and of one of the sermons it contains, refers to an actual character, one Lyman Woodward, who, in 1831, celebrated the addition of a new steeple to a Vermont church, it seems, by climbing into the belfry and standing on his head with his feet waving exaggeratedly toward the sky. This was, as Buechner notes, "a crazy thing to do . . . a risky thing to do. It ran counter to all standards of New England practicality and prudence." It was, also, just the kind of wild, hopeful, and improbable gesture that most catches Buechner's eye. When the grace of God passes through the unpredictabilities and distortions of human life, it "is broken to pieces . . . like a light through a prism and reaches us looking like everything except what it is." Lyman Woodward's belfry stunt, thus, "was a gorgeous, clownish, inspired, and inspiring thing to do. . . . And it was also a magical and magnificent and Mozartian thing to do. Buechner urges us to "join him in the belfry with our feet toward Heaven like his because Heaven is where we are heading."

This book, therefore, is vintage Buechner, and readers will appreciate it, I suppose, to the degree that they find his prose satisfying more generally. Personally, the most gratifying episode in the book is Buechner's description of a side trip he and his wife took one day to Milledgeville, Georgia, hometown of Flannery O'Connor. He visited the cemetery—"Memory Hill"—where she is buried, the Catholic church where she worshiped, and Andalusia, her farm. Gazing at her seemingly deserted house, Buechner said a silent prayer of thanksgiving. "I wished of all things grace to her, of course, and peace. And I said the best I could by way of thanks—to the Lord and giver of Life for giving us her, to her for giving us a glimpse through all the freakishness and sadness of things down toward the glowing heart."

I utter the same grateful prayer for Frederick Buechner.

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